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EFFECTS OF USING ENGLISH IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION
IN JAPANESE-BASED MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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Japanese companies are internationalising and becoming increasingly involved in global business. It has become more and more common in Japan to use English, the global language of business. Recently, English has been introduced as the official language of a few Japanese corporations and discussions are going on in many other companies. English is not used for international operations solely but it is required in almost all functions.

English has an undeniable role as the lingua franca of global business. Using English is no more a choice but inevitable for companies trying to compete in international markets. Yet, the effects of English in business communication have not been studied much until recent years.

The aim of this research is to examine the effects of using English in Japanese-based multinational corporations. Using qualitative research method, the empirical part of the study is comprised of a two-step research including three interviews and a questionnaire. Participants were selected from four Japanese-based multinational corporations.

Three main topics are discussed in the study. Firstly, the role of language skills in cross-cultural business communication is analysed. Secondly, the effects of using English in Japanese companies are studied on two levels including individual and company levels. On individual level, it is discussed how using English affects job performance, and how English language skills affect career development in Japanese corporations. On company level, it is examined how the corporate strategy can support effective use of English in Japanese companies.

There were two main findings in this study. Firstly, English language skills can contribute to better job performance and promotion in Japanese-based multinational corporations. Employees with English language skills seem to have better chances for promotion and overseas assignments, and have wider career choices. On the other hand, using English can make communication slow, cause misunderstanding, create frustration and create barriers for employees with poor language skills. Secondly, it was found out that the company strategy has an essential role in supporting effective business communication in English. Not only can the company choose the right language policy, but it can enhance effective use of English, by creating an encouraging atmosphere and offering its employees opportunities to use and practise English language skills.

In summary, by presenting a qualitative study of Japanese-based multinational corporations, this research aims at contributing to better understanding of effective business communication. The role of language cannot be left aside, since effective cross-cultural business communication can define Japanese companies’ success in today’s multicultural business world.

This study was conducted in Tohoku University research programme during academic year 2012–2013, in Sendai, Japan.

Keywords
Cross-cultural communication, corporate language, internationalisation, language
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Introducing English as a corporate language is a current topic in Japan. A few Japanese companies such as Rakuten and Fast Retailing have already launched English as corporate language and discussions are taking place in other companies (Takahashi 2010). Yet, it seems that introducing English as a corporate language is not an easy task, since using English brings both advantages and disadvantages for companies (Kowner 2002, Goldman 1994, Takahashi 2010). English enables cross-cultural communication and makes it possible to expand businesses globally. However, using English can also create a barrier (Welch et al. 2005).

Language is said to be at the core of international business (Charles 2007). The role of English cannot be neglected since “English is now the global language of business” (Neeley 2012:117). When using English in international business, there are both positive and negative effects involved (Welch et al. 2005). For example, language can be a resource and a facilitator for a company doing international business, since using English can make it possible to share information and knowledge (ibid.). On the other hand, communication flows can be distorted, filtered or blocked because of using English (ibid.).

Until recent years, little research has been conducted examining the connection between language and its effects on business (Harzing & Pudelko 2013). It is argued that there is a “growing need to know more about cultural and linguistic internationalization and standardization” and how to make cross-cultural communication effective (Louhiala-Salminen & Rogerson-Revell 2010:93). As international communication plays a significant role in the multicultural business environment, there is a definite need to examine the role of English language on business communication. This study focuses on how using English affects business communication in Japanese companies.
It is argued that internationalisation has become inevitable for many Japanese companies (Yoshida 1997). Therefore, English is increasingly involved in everyday business. Until now, however, little research about the effects of English in Japanese companies has been conducted that would be available in English. Therefore, this research is aiming at providing a better understanding of the situation in Japanese companies.

Japan is an interesting case to look at, since many Japanese companies have only started to globalise since the global financial crisis started in 2008 (Disco Inc. 2012a). It is argued that Japanese multinational corporations’ (MNC) ability to promote cross-cultural communication skills will define Japanese companies’ success in the global business environment in the future (ibid.). The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Rakuten, one of the few Japanese companies having English as corporate language, has stated that Japanese companies cannot fully compete in international markets because of the language barrier (Wakabayashi 2012). Moreover, hiring non-Japanese staff and looking for global talent is impeded by lack of English proficiency (ibid.).

As Welch et al. (2005) argue, language skills are individual skills. For example, language skills can provide some individuals power to control communication (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a). Previous literature has pointed out that language skills and cross-cultural communication skills are considered essential for expatriates, contributing to better job performance (Bhatti et al. 2013). However, because of internationalisation, these skills are not valuable for expatriates only, but for everyone in multinational companies (Bloch 1995). Therefore, the first aim of this study is to discuss the role of language skills in cross-cultural business communication. The second aim is to examine what kind of effects English language skills bring on individual level and how language skills are connected to job performance and career development.

To become a successful global company, using English seems necessary (Clark 2012). Moreover, according to Bloch (1995:25) “language capabilities represent a vital and indispensable means of differentiating one’s company positively and
advantageously from others in industry”. Therefore, the third aim of this research is to examine how company strategy can support effective use of English.

1.2. Research questions and objectives

Focusing on Japanese companies, this study aims at examining the effects of communicating in English at workplace. To examine the effects of English in Japanese-based multinational corporations, the main research question is:

What kinds of effects does it bring to use English in business communication in Japanese-based multinational corporations in their departments located in Japan?

In order to get a more detailed picture of the effects of using English, three sub-questions are introduced. Sub-questions aim at creating a more comprehensive picture of the situation. The first sub-question is:

1. What is the role of language skills in cross-cultural business communication?

The first sub-question creates background for understanding the role of language skills in international business. Then, the second and the third sub-questions focus on examining the situation in Japanese-based multinational corporations at individual and company level.

2. How do English language skills affect individuals’ job performance in Japanese-based multinational corporations?

With the help of the second sub-question, it is examined how English language skills affect job performance of individuals. This includes examining the effects of language skills on career development. The third question, on the contrary, focuses on the company performance. The third sub-question is:

3. How can the company strategy contribute to effective use of English in Japanese-based multinational corporations?
The third sub-question focuses on how the company strategy can support effective use of English. It examines what kind of factors related to languages need to be taken into account when designing a corporate strategy. Issues such as having a language policy is discussed. To get a picture of the situation at company level, it is examined what kind of challenges Japanese companies face when using English and how these challenges could be overcome.

With sub-questions 2. and 3., using English is examined on individual and company level. In summary, with the help of the main research question and the sub-questions, this research aims at contributing to better understanding of effective business communication, by introducing a qualitative study of Japanese-based multinational corporations. The study examines the issue from the viewpoint of Japanese MNCs’ headquarters (HQ) and other departments located in Japan.

1.3. Basic concepts

**Communication** is a process or action in which people interactively convey messages by creating and interpreting meanings (Åberg 2002:54). Castells (2009:54) defines communication as sharing meanings through exchanging information. The process is affected by how senders and receivers understand the information, as well as by their cultural backgrounds, communication protocols and the context of the action (Castells 2009:54).

**Cross-cultural** can be defined as “involving or bridging the differences between cultures” (Collins English Dictionary 2013a). **Cross-cultural communication** refers to communication between people from different cultures (Gudykunst 2003:VII).

**Multinational Corporation (MNC)** is a company that is “registered and operates in more than one country at a time” (Encyclopædia Britannica Inc. 2013). The company headquarters is usually located in one country and the company has subsidiaries in other countries (ibid.). This paper presents a study of Japanese-based multinational corporations that have their headquarters in Japan.
**Internationalisation** means the process of extending economic activities into new countries. **Globalisation** can be described as growing worldwide interconnections. Because of globalisation, boundaries between and within organisations and nations are diminishing. Globalisation has changed the context of many activities in today’s organisations. Globalisation is characterised by rapid change and growing diversity. (Parker 2005:5–7, 9.)

**Job performance** refers to work-related activities and how well an employee is able to execute them (Business Dictionary 2013a). In this study, job performance refers to how business communication in English affects performing work-related activities.

**Career** refers to “patterns and sequences of occupations and positions occupied by people across their lives” (Young & Collin 2000:3). **Career development** is the lifelong process of developing and managing one’s life (CICA Inc. 2013). It can include learning, different kinds of jobs, promotion, moving to another organisation and leisure. In this study, career is examined in the context of work life.

**Language policy** means a company policy that supports using a certain language or languages in an organisation. **Common corporate language** refers to a language that the company has decided to use for its inter-unit communication, including for instance meetings and company documents. (Thomas 2007.)

**Company strategy** can be described as a long-term plan aiming at success (Collins English Dictionary 2013b). Strategy can also be seen as a method chosen to achieve desired future goals (Business Dictionary 2013b). This study examines language policies as a part of a company strategy.

### 1.4. Methodology

This research was conducted in a research programme offered by Tohoku University during academic year 2012–2013 in Graduate School of Economics and Management, Sendai, Japan. However, as the research is part of a Master’s Degree Programme of the University of Oulu, the thesis is designed considering the
guidelines of the University of Oulu. The research programme in Tohoku University made it possible to access and to conduct empirical research interviewing people in Japanese companies.

This paper presents a study consisting of a theoretical part and a qualitative empirical study. The theoretical part of the research is based on previous research including articles in academic journals, books and internet sources. Tohoku University library and database, as well as the Oulu University library and database were used for finding relevant literature. Because of the topicality of introducing English as the common corporate language in Japanese companies, online newspaper articles were used among other resources.

After examining previous studies about the effects of English, a theoretical framework was designed. The theoretical framework forms a background for empirical research. The theoretical part provides tools to interpret and present empirical data findings.

The empirical research was conducted in Japan during summer and autumn 2013. The empirical data was collected using a qualitative two-step research method. The data collections methods include three semi-structured interviews in three Japanese-based multinational corporations, as well as a questionnaire sent to participants in two Japanese-based multinational corporations. The empirical data findings were analysed comparing them to the theoretical framework.

1.5. Structure of the paper

This paper presents a qualitative empirical study. The paper starts with a literature review and continues with an empirical study. The outline of the paper can be seen in table 1.

The first chapter presents introduction to the research topic. It provides background information about the study, and defines research questions, basic concepts and methodology of the study.
The theoretical part is comprised of two parts, chapter 2 and chapter 3. In chapter 2, internationalisation of Japanese companies, career development in Japanese companies and the current situation of using English in the Japanese business environment are studied based on previous literature available. In chapter 3, cross-cultural communication, connection between language skills and career development, the role of English as a lingua franca and language policies are examined. At the end of the chapter 3, a theoretical framework is presented.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology of the empirical research in detail, and leads to chapter 5, the empirical part of the research. The empirical part consists of a two-step qualitative study including an interview study and a questionnaire study. Four Japanese-based multinational corporations were chosen for the qualitative study. The data findings are first analysed separately and then together at the end of the chapter 5.

After examining the results of the empirical study, conclusions and possible managerial implications are presented in the final chapter 6. The study is also evaluated in this chapter. Finally, suggestions for future research are given.
Table 1. Structure of the research.

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| 1. Introduction | • Introduction to the topic  
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| 2. Japan in the global business world | • Internationalisation of Japanese companies  
• Japan and English  
• Japanese culture and business communication  
• Career development in Japan |
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| 6. Discussion | • Conclusions  
• Managerial implications  
• Evaluation of the study  
• Suggestions for future research |
2. JAPAN IN THE GLOBAL BUSINESS WORLD

2.1. Internationalisation of Japanese companies

It is argued that since the 1990s, internationalisation has been a key issue for Japanese companies (Yoshida 1997). Internationalisation is no longer a choice but it has become inevitable (ibid.). To understand the current situation in Japan, it is worth examining, what kind of a pattern the internationalisation process of Japanese economy has followed.

Japan’s situation in the global markets can be considered somewhat unique. Japan is strongly dependent on international trade, as it has almost no natural resources and has to import a wide variety of goods (Akao & White 1981, Maeda 1990:92). Therefore, foreign trade has always played a central role for the Japanese economy (Maeda 1990:92). However, Japan started to open up to international markets only at the end of the 19th century (Maeda 1990:93).

Before that, Japan had been isolated from the rest of the world for 200 years (Maeda 1990:93). Starting in 1868, the Meiji government ambitiously aimed at changes so that Japan was able to compete with western nations both militarily and economically (Hall et al. 2007: 308–360, Macpherson 1987:15–18). During the next decades, Japan started to open up to the influence of western countries (Hall et al. 2007: 308–360, Macpherson 1987:15–18).

After World War II, the economic growth in Japan was exceptionally rapid and many Japanese companies grew into successful multinational enterprises (Takatoshi 1996). Few countries have undergone such economic growth as Japan in 1955–1974, called the ‘era of high-speed growth’ in Japan (Allinson 1997:83, 122). Even during these decades, foreign trade was relatively modest compared to the country’s gross domestic product (GDP), accounting for around 11 per cent of it (Allinson 1997:99). Internationalisation of Japanese businesses was mainly done by large enterprises such as Mitsui, Mitsubishi and Sumitomo that had long history of overseas operations (Allinson 1997:100). International factors including high global demand,
cheap raw materials, stable currency rates and few barriers for international trade made internationalisation smooth for Japanese companies (Allinson 1997:126). During the high growth era, Japanese companies’ internationalisation strategies were mainly export-oriented (Gao 2009:311).

According to Yoshihara (1999), even though Japanese manufacturing companies have long experience of international operations, foreign subsidiaries are traditionally managed by Japanese expatriates. Therefore, Japanese managers used to take care of global operations using Japanese language. It can be stated that global management of Japanese MNCs has relied on Japanese management from parent companies located in Japan. This has been common not only in manufacturing companies but also in other Japanese-based corporations. Communication about important issues between subsidiaries and headquarters has been traditionally conducted in Japanese language. During the high growth period, this Japanese style international management was a practical way to transfer technology to overseas subsidiaries from the parent company and to respond to the needs of Japanese customers. (Yoshihara 1999.)

The high economic growth stopped to ‘bubble economy’ at the end of the 1980s, and was followed by the ‘lost two decades’ (Gao 2009:299, Obstfeld 2009). Nevertheless, this has not diminished the importance of international aspects for Japanese companies but vice versa. Since the 1980s, Japanese businesses have been forced to go abroad to seek new opportunities (Allinson 1997:123). It is argued that despite of the success of numerous Japanese MNCs, Japanese businesses were somewhat isolated even until the beginning of the 1990s (Tanaka 2006). After that, Japanese companies have been forced to adjust to globalisation (Gao 2009:311).

Starting from the 1980s, MNCs have been reorganising their businesses, trade has been liberalised and technology has been developing rapidly (Dehesh & Pugh 1999). Japanese companies have moved from export-oriented internationalisation to establishing manufacturing and research & development (R&D) units abroad (Yoshihara 1999). Japanese MNCs have been forced to find new ways of doing business internationally. Shrinking domestic markets in addition to aging population
and workforce have accelerated internationalisation of Japanese companies (Muldowney 2013).

Internationalisation of Japanese companies, most of all for manufacturing companies, has been particularly rapid in the 2000s (Asakawa et al. 2012). It is argued that many Japanese companies have started their internationalisation process because of the global financial crisis starting in 2008 (Disco Inc. 2012a). Due to globalisation and the current recession, the importance of intercultural communication is more significant than ever before (Yoshida et al. 2013).

Many western MNCs have started their globalisation processes earlier than their Japanese counterparts (Disco Inc. 2012b, Muldowney 2013). Therefore, Japanese companies are now trying to catch up in order to be competitive in the global business environment (Disco Inc. 2012b). This includes changing their human resources (HR) policies, including hiring more non-Japanese people and global-oriented Japanese people with intercultural communications and language skills (Disco Inc. 2012a). In other words, Japanese companies are starting to look for talented people regardless of nationality (Muldowney 2013). Moreover, companies are now designing programmes that offer real cross-cultural experiences for their employees (Disco Inc. 2012b). It is argued that Japanese companies’ success in the future will depend on effective intercultural business communication (ibid.). For cross-cultural communication, English language competences are needed in Japanese companies.

2.2. Japan and English

Even though English is becoming increasingly important in Japan, it is still argued that the country is far behind other industrialised nations (Disco Inc. 2012b). Most Japanese people have learnt English at least for six years by the time they finish high school but the proficiency of English is still limited (Iwasaki 2006:94). Despite the fact that millions of Japanese students study for and take English language tests every year, Japanese students do not rank high in international English tests (Disco Inc. 2012b). According to the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in
2011, the level of English is significantly lower than in other industrialised countries (TOEFL 2012). Japan had an average score of 69/100 compared to the average of all countries 81–82/100 in 2011. In 2011, Japan’s average score was among the lowest of all the countries involved in the test (TOEFL 2012).

English is taught in Japanese schools starting from the fifth grade, although the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has now introduced plans to start English lessons from the third grade. The ministry argues that starting learning English earlier will make Japanese students better prepared for the international environment in the future. Already in 2013, a new curriculum was introduced that enacted English lessons to be conducted mainly in English language in high schools and the focus shifting from grammar to communication. Moreover, the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education is introducing requirements for English teachers to study abroad. Until now, no overseas studies have been required to become an English teacher in a public school in Japan. These changes are scheduled to take place by 2020. (Mainichi Japan 2013a, 2013b.)

English education is considered necessary in Japan to compete in the global market. However, according to a study conducted by Rakuten Research, 90 per cent of Japanese respondents were unsatisfied with the country’s English education. The study indicated that English education is criticised for not giving enough opportunities to learn practical English skills. Moreover, it was considered that English education is too much oriented around studying for exams rather than practising verbal language skills. (Torres 2012.)

Traditionally, English tests have played an important role when evaluating people’s language skills in Japanese companies. In some companies, there is a minimum level of English that is required for new graduates entering the company and for promotion. However, there has been a problem that it is difficult measure business communications skills and ability to communicate in real-world international environment. (Disco Inc. 2012a.)
It has to be noted that since Japan is the third largest economy in the world (BBC News 2013), it has a large domestic market and the importance of the local language is still high (Harzing & Pudelko 2013). Therefore, the situation is different than in companies that are internationalising from smaller countries such as Nordic countries with limited domestic markets and low importance of the local language worldwide (Harzing & Pudelko 2013). In Japanese domestic markets, Japanese language plays an important role. But to compete internationally, it is argued that foreign language skills are essential for Japanese employees (Yoshida et al. 2013).

It seems that Japanese companies are starting to look for employees who can understand and communicate efficiently with people from different backgrounds, instead of relying on English test results (Disco Inc. 2012b). After the beginning of the global financial crisis in 2008, some Japanese companies have adopted English as their official language (Disco Inc. 2012a). Although it is clear that it does not automatically lead to effective international communication, it is seen as a positive step towards keeping up with globalisation (ibid.).

### 2.3. Japanese culture and business communication

There is a tight connection between language and culture, and it is argued that they both play a major role in cross-cultural negotiation (Salacuse 1999). Hall (1976:57) goes even further with the connection between language and culture presenting the idea that culture is communication. Even if people are able to communicate in a foreign language, they tend to interpret meanings depending on their own culture and language (Peltokorpi 2007). Charles (2007) argues that most non-native speakers of English face difficulties when communicating in a foreign language.

Goldman (1994) states that it is be beneficial for Japan-related studies to examine the situation from a culture-specific and context-specific viewpoint. In this chapter, some aspects of Japanese culture and language are discussed in order to understand how they can affect international business communication. Four topics are introduced to portray some viewpoints of Japanese culture including high-context culture, collectivistic culture, status differences and negotiation styles.
Japanese language has some special characteristics that largely differ from western languages (Kowner 2002). According to famous cultural studies by Hall (1976, 1981), Japan is considered a high-context culture, meaning that a lot of information is conveyed through environmental cues rather than by expressing knowledge verbally (Hall 1981:65–68). Hall (1981:65–66) states that communication, especially when discussing important things, is often roundabout and indirect in Japan. Peltokorpi (2007) argues that people from western low-context cultures often misunderstand their Japanese colleagues’ hidden messages. Even when Japanese people use English, true intentions are often hidden (ibid.). According to Gudykunst (2003:60), western cultures can be described as cultures of words, whereas eastern cultures including Japanese culture can be described as cultures of harmony.

As Japan is considered a collectivistic culture, the welfare and harmony of a group is considered more meaningful than individuals’ opinions (Kowner 2002). In Japan, groups aim for long-term and consistent solutions, and therefore personal motivation is not so important (idib.). Listening and being able to adjust to others’ opinions is traditionally valued, and expressing one’s own opinion is not so much encouraged (Yoshida et al. 2013). Even if Japanese people have important information, it is not necessary to express it verbally (Hall 1981:67). Japanese people do not necessarily have to express their personal opinions in business situations, whereas western managers might be expecting Japanese people to tell their opinions (Yoshida et al. 2013). This often causes stress for Japanese people when communicating with western people (idib.). Furthermore, expressing unpleasant issues verbally is avoided by using indirect ways of communication (Eto 2006:91, Hara 2001).

Like many Asians, Japanese people pay a lot of attention to status differences (Peltokorpi 2007, Gudygust 2013:62). According to Kowner (2002) this also affects business situations in which English is used. Japanese grammar and the way of speaking are different depending on people’s status (Peltokorpi 2007). In Japanese language, there are several levels of politeness. Different forms are used depending on the situation and relationships between people. According to Kowner (2002), Japanese people sometimes feel that their status is violated when speaking with foreigners, since foreigners’ communication style is often more direct and similar to
high-status Japanese communication even though foreigners were on same level or lower in status.

The way meetings and discussions are organised is also different compared to western methods. Goldman (1994) argues that Japanese *negotiating strategies* are often respectful of Japanese national culture. For example, in a case study conducted in a Japanese subsidiary in Scotland, Japanese managers often organised ‘nemawashi’, meaning informal meetings to reach consensus before actual meetings (Wright et al. 2001). The Scottish work force felt that they were excluded from decision-making (ibid.).

However, it seems that big changes are taking place in Japan. According to the study of Yoshida et al. (2013), younger generations do not necessarily know how to use the polite forms of Japanese language. Moreover, as life time employment is diminishing, there are more people at workplace with different backgrounds who are used to different kinds of working methods and communication styles, and might not understand each other’s hidden messages as well as before. Even though Japan is said to be one of the most homogenous countries in the world, it seems that changes are occurring faster than in the past. (Yoshida et al. 2013.)

2.4. Career development in Japan

Career development in Japanese companies differs from that of European or American companies (Kazuo 1996:87,262). Traditionally in Japan, it has been common that employees stay in one company during their careers (Kazuo 1996:86). Careers have been enterprise-specific, meaning that employees are promoted and assigned to different kinds of work tasks within a company during their careers depending on the company policy (ibid.). The way a career path is formed is unique in each company (ibid.). Japanese companies form internal labour markets in which an employee’s career is a process consisting of various posts in the same company or related companies (Mouer & Kawanishi 2005:258).
Kazuo (1996:86) mentions three aspects that affect career formation in Japanese companies including labour mix, company policies and business environment. Salaries have traditionally been determined by seniority, ability, educational degree and job description (Mouer & Kawanishi 2005:258). Company leaders have also been selected from the company rather than hiring outside managers; it has been considered important for leaders of large Japanese companies that they have wide experience within the specific company, preferably in all of the company’s important posts (Kazuo 1996:262).

Moreover, Japanese companies have specific recruitment practices (Deller & Flunkert 1996). It is common that new university graduates are hired by companies directly after graduation (ibid.). As Ishida, Spilerman and Su (1997) state, it is typical that large companies recruit graduates only from highly ranked schools. Typically, new graduates have no professional experience when they enter the company (Deller & Flunkert 1996, Ishida 1999). Companies do not hire graduates for specific positions but employees’ careers begin with intensive training, after which they get their first fixed positions for the next few years (Deller & Flunkert 1996). Quick promotions for young employees are rare in Japan (ibid.). However, job rotation is typical, meaning that employees get work experience in different areas and with many colleagues and supervisors inside the company (ibid.).

![Diagram](image-url)

**Figure 1. Internal labour markets in Japan and in other countries (modified from Ishida 1999:7).**
Figure 1 illustrates how internal labour markets are traditionally organised in Japanese and western organisations. In Japan, the only way to enter the company is to join the company at the lowest level and “gradually climb the corporate ladder” (Ishida 1999:8). Thick walls of Japanese organisations represent that outsiders are rarely hired for higher-level positions, whereas in other countries, people can be apply for any position at any level, and easily change the company. In Japan, employees work hard to get promoted inside the company, but in other countries, employees look for new opportunities outside the company. It has to be noted that women have not had similar chances for career enhancement in Japan. Women have often been working with temporary contracts and have been given significantly lower status and salaries than male colleagues. (Ishida 1999.)

In today’s Japan, career paths and work in general are influenced by aging population, changing employment practices such as hiring more women at workplace, and growing international competition. Since the 1990s, life-time employment has not been possible anymore in its traditional way. However, it is argued that long-term employment will still play an important role in Japan, especially for the core labour force in large companies in manufacturing industries. Mouer and Kawanishi (2005:260) give examples of large Japanese companies that are committed to long-term employment practices. (Mouer & Kawanishi 2005:258–260.)

It is argued that there will be new factors influencing career development in addition to traditional ones in Japan (Disco Inc. 2012b). Some Japanese companies have already changed their human resources strategies, including a Japanese retailing company presented in a case study conducted by Taniguchi (2006). The company started to promote diversity in its HR policy and proved that diversity can be successfully managed in Japanese companies (ibid.).

Kato and Suzuki (2006) present a study about increasing interest in career design in Japan. Traditionally, companies used to take care of their workers’ career development. But since life-time employment is not taken for granted to the extent that it used to be, Japanese people have to take more responsibility of planning their
own careers. Career design needs to be conducted more independently than in the past. (Kato & Suzuki 2006.)

According to Kazuo (1996:263), overseas experience will play an important role in career development in Japan. Kazuo (1996:263) states that in key positions of Japanese companies’ headquarters, “only those who have spent at least five years working abroad” should be employed. Overseas experience should be seen as a contributing factor to one’s career. (Kazuo 1996:263.)

It is argued that English language skills may be required even in the initial stages of recruitment so that only candidates with English language skills might be considered. English language skills might be one measure of employee’s ability in the future in Japanese companies, shaping employee’s careers in the company. It is argued that companies and employees that can best promote cross-cultural communication skills and diversity will define Japanese companies’ role in the global environment in the future. (Disco Inc. 2012b.)
3. ENGLISH IN CROSS-CULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

3.1. Cross-cultural communication

After examining the context of internationalisation in Japanese companies, career development and the role of English in Japan, it is examined in this chapter what is the role of English in international business in general. To start with, Castells (2009:46) states that “culture is most embedded in the process of communication [---] with global multimedia business networks [---] at its core”. Therefore, cultural differences influence international communication (Carles 2007).

Technology has made cross-cultural communication part of our everyday lives. However, it is argued that intercultural interaction still remains challenging. Both various languages as well as differences in non-verbal communication influence cross-cultural interaction. Communication styles and the use of language depend on peoples’ culture. Gudykunst (2003:111) even argues that “cross-cultural relations are characterized by misunderstandings, misinterpretations and miscommunications”. (Gudykunst 2003:66, 73–74,111.)

In business context, understanding the effects of cultural differences is particularly important. In international business, people use different languages, different negotiation styles and different business etiquettes. In addition, ways of perceiving the world and to express feelings, motivations and interests vary. (Hendon et al. 1996:231.)

Zhao (1996) argues that cross-cultural communication skills need to be learned by practical experience. Knowledge of different cultures is essential for intercultural communication (Hendon et al. 1996:21). Then again, it is argued that when communicating with people from different cultures, it is important to be careful not to make stereotypes because this can lead to miscommunication (Hendon et al. 1996:17).
Finally, it has to be taken into account that people are individuals and might act contrary to expectations. Not everybody in some culture has a similar communication style. When speaking about cultural differences, it is impossible to take into account all individuals. Therefore, cultural studies give some idea of cultural traits that many people from one culture share but it cannot be expected that they would apply for everyone in the culture. (Gudykunst 2003:85.)

It is argued that as language is part of culture, it is hard to distinguish the effects of language from the effects of cultural factors (Welch et al. 2005). Both language and culture play major roles in cross-cultural negotiation (Salacuse 1999). However, to understand the role of language, Welch et al. (2005) argue that it is necessary to study language as its own factor.

3.2. Role of language in intercultural communication

According to Charles (2007:261) “only language can enable individuals and companies [--] to communicate”. Charles (2007) argues that in MNCs, language issues concern everyone in the organisation. Language can be seen as the core of international management (Piekkari & Zander 2005). Language skills are individual skills, but they have an impact on international business on a wider scale (ibid.). In international business, language skills not only affect the performance of individuals but also the performance of an organisation as a whole (Charles 2007, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a).

On company level, Welch, Welch and Piekkari (2005) argue that language impacts international management in several ways including international communication and negotiations, knowledge transfer and knowledge management as well as relationships between headquarters and subsidiaries. In addition, there are other things such control, coordination and integration inside multinational corporations that are affected by language issues. (Welch et al. 2005.)

On individual level, Hofstede (2001:425) argues that “having to express oneself in another language means having to adopt someone else’s frame of reference”. This
illustrates how much language affects our way of thinking. For example, language affects how people encode and decode messages (Hendon et al. 1996:43). More precisely, culture gives us a framework to communicate (Hendon et al. 1996:17).

Marschan-Piekkari, Welch and Welch (1999a) argue in their in-depth case study of a Finnish-based multinational, Kone, that language has various effects on communication such as creating a barrier, facilitating communication and being a source of power. Firstly, language can create a barrier when using a foreign language causes misunderstandings or distorts communication. This can be due to limited written, verbal or technical language skills. Sometimes lack of language skills can hinder building relationships and informal networks inside a company or make it difficult to participate in corporate training. Secondly, if people speak the same language, communication will be facilitated. Moreover, people who have good language skills can be offered more opportunities to participate in international meetings and trainings. Thirdly, people with language skills can have more power than they would according to their formal position. If people have more language skills than others they might be given more power and responsibility to take care of important business contacts. (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a.)

According to a case study by Louhiala-Salminen (2002), using a foreign language was seen as a main cause of communication difficulties in a merger between Finnish and Swedish companies. For instance, lack of language skills can create a feeling of isolation and social exclusion (Welch et al. 2005). Harzing and Feely (2008) argue that even if non-native speakers have some proficiency in the common language, they have difficulties to feel relaxed and effective in communication situations. Linguistically skilled employees can act as ‘information gatekeepers’ who can, for example, delay, filter or distort communication flows when it seems beneficial for them. It is also argued that regardless of foreign language fluency, people have different attitudes towards communicating in a foreign language with foreigners (Welch et al. 2005).

It is argued that direct communication is essential when doing cross-cultural business (Welch et al. 2005). This usually requires a common language (ibid.). During
translation, it is possible that the message is softened and made culturally acceptable (ibid.). Translators can help but, usually, only a common language can allow people to understand underlying meanings (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a, Welch et al. 2005). There are expressions that are so tightly connected to culture that it is hard, if not impossible, to translate them (Blenkinsopp & Pajouh 2010). It is argued that language skills can contribute to better *cultural awareness* and intellectual growth for individuals (Bloch 1995).

In summary, language can facilitate or hinder communication in a large scale between company units but it can also have various effects on individual level, either offering or limiting opportunities. To get a more detailed picture of the effects of language on individuals, it is examined how language skills affect career development.

### 3.3. Language skills and career development

Globalisation and cultural issues have wide effects on careers in today’s organisations (Leong & Hartung 2000:212, Bloch 1995). Entirely new job positions are created and new skills and qualifications are required (Buchholz et al. 2006). It is argued that as multiculturalism is increasing in our societies, it will shape our understanding of “the multicultural future of career” (Leong & Hartung 2000:213). Therefore, career development takes place in a multicultural context, where different values, decision-making styles, time perspectives, communication styles and languages are involved (Leong & Hartung 2000:216). In this research, it is considered how language skills affect career development.

According to Bloch’s (1995) study, language skills can contribute to career enhancement. Through language skills, employees’ career prospects are enhanced. Firstly, Bloch (1995:16) argues that “high level of knowledge of a foreign language enables one to do things that would otherwise be impossible”. Therefore, employees can be assigned to new kinds of work tasks and even to new positions if they are able to speak a foreign language. Many companies only recruit candidates with specific
language skills for their international positions. Thus, language skills can contribute to getting a job in the first place. (Bloch 1995.)

A considerable advantage of language skills is that they are often linked to overseas and cross-cultural communication experiences (Bloch 1995). In international business, the value of overseas experience can hardly be overestimated as it offers employees enhanced career prospects and possibilities to acquire new skills (ibid.). Spending time in a foreign country usually helps to develop language and cross-cultural skills (ibid.). As there are people with various backgrounds in today’s multicultural business world, language skills are considered to be invaluable when managing cross-cultural differences (ibid.). Clark (2012) argues that language skills in one or more foreign languages are necessary in order to become a global leader.

Considering the many benefits of language skills, knowledge of a foreign language can be considered a valuable resource for employees. However, it is argued that although language skills are important in international business, they are seldom sufficient without a combination of other kinds of skills. Integrating foreign language skills with business skills, educational background and cross-cultural communication skills is essential. (Bloch 1995.)

Language skills can give opportunities for some employees, and enhance their career, but create a barrier for other people. According to a case study of Finnish and Swedish banks, people who did not speak the company language fluently, felt that their professional competence was negatively affected and that they had less chances for promotion than native speakers (Piekkari et al. 2005). Non-native speakers can feel that they are disqualified if they are required to use a foreign language and that best jobs are offered to people who have highest language skills (Neeley 2012). In a study of Neeley (2013) of a French-based company, about half of the employees who had medium-fluency or low-fluency in English were worried about their careers because of their language skills. However, it is argued that not all the challenges that employees face are as difficult to overcome in reality, as people tend to think (Neeley 2012). Neeley (2012) states that workers often underestimate their language skills.
It is possible that employees feel anxiety about their job performance and insecurity about their jobs if they are required to use a foreign language at work. But if language skills are improved, their emotional concerns diminish and they start to enjoy using a foreign language. In this case, improving language skills can contribute to career enhancement. Language skills can also make people seek for jobs or positions in which they have opportunities to use their language skills. Therefore, employees’ language skills can to some extent shape people’s careers. (Hoare 2012.)

Many of the effects of language skills are indirect such as better cultural awareness and intellectual growth. In addition, although language skills are considered beneficial, language training also imposes costs for individuals, societies and companies, since mastering a foreign language requires a lot of time and high motivation. (Bloch 1995.)

Therefore, studying languages can be considered an investment. Nevertheless, it has to be taken into account that language skills as such cannot be considered a way to maximize one’s earnings or to achieve well-paid positions. More likely, language skills can secure one’s position in the field of international business, and offer capabilities to perform international tasks well and effectively. (Bloch 1995.)

Figure 2. Language skills as one of the contributing factors to career development.

Finally, the connection between language skills and career development is not easy to measure, since many issues contribute to career development (Bloch 1995). In
figure 2, it is presented how different factors impact career development. Firstly, individuals’ career objectives, motivation, language skills and other skills affect career paths. Secondly, the company policy and opportunities to use language skills affect how employees’ careers are formed.

3.4. Language and company strategy

Language skills can be considered important on individual level in MNCs, since language skills affect job performance and career development. On company level, globalisation affects work conditions and how work is organised in today’s companies (Rantanen 2002:28, Mouer & Kawanishi 2005:257). It is argued that workplace is one of the key arenas of global change (Rantanen 2002:28). Both local and global needs have to be considered for designing competitive organisations, workplace and careers (Mouer & Kawanishi 2005:257). Demographic changes of global workforce, new technologies and the need for new competences and skills of employees affect enterprise structures (Rantanen 2002:28). In this chapter, it is discussed why language issues need to be taken into account in company strategy.

For organisations, languages can create possibilities and barriers (Welch et al. 2005). For instance, companies can differentiate themselves and gain competitive advantage through language capabilities (Bloch 1995). A well-designed language strategy that suits the company structure will contribute to efficient communication, coordination and sharing of knowledge (Luo & Shenkar 2006). On the other hand, languages can sometimes create a barrier for companies to enter countries in which a different language is spoken (ibid.).

Firstly, one of the most important aspects is the role of languages on company image. Foreign language skills can create better overseas image for companies (Bloch 1995). The international image of a company is to some extend dependent on its use of language (ibid.). In addition to the outside image, a company can also create global atmosphere inside the company by introducing a common corporate language (Thomas 2007, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b).
For instance, a Finnish-based multinational company Nokia started its global focus as early as by the mid-1990s (Steinbock 2001:143). This included changing the language policy of the company and introducing English as corporate language. Steinbock (2001:136) argues that “Nokia did everything it could to encourage a global mindset within the company, including making English its official language”.

It is even argued that because of globalisation “multinationals tend to rid themselves of their national identity” (Rantanen 2002:29). Introducing a new language policy can cause strong reactions and emotions (Welch et al. 2005). People might be afraid that their cultural heritage is forgotten when the language is changed to English (Neeley 2012).

Bhatti et al. (2013) argue that organisational structures can support expatriate’s job performance and smoother international communication. Yet, since pure domestic work is diminishing and workplaces are becoming multicultural, it is important that the need for language skills and cross-cultural business communication is taken into account in company strategy (Bloch 1995). Language skills are needed in many departments of multinational corporations, and it is hard to say which organisational functions need language skills the most (ibid.).

In addition to designing a language policy, language issues have to be taken into account in wider perspective in company strategy. Welch et al. (2005) argue that language issues should be considered in human resources management, in addition to other departments. Companies need personnel with language skills for various kinds of tasks - they are needed both in foreign departments as well as in domestic markets (Bloch 1995). For example, effective placement and movement of staff depends on language skills and language policies (Welch et al. 2005).

To summarise, it is beneficial to consider language issues when designing company strategy. Since languages have wide effects on company level, effective use of languages can be considered an advantage for MNCs. One way to enhance effective use of languages is to implement language policies as part of the company strategy.
3.5. Language policies

MNCs can choose various language policies for their inter-unit communication. This means that the company decides to use certain language or languages in its inter-unit communication (Thomas 2007). Many MNCs have moved towards language standardisation. That is to say, they have introduced a common corporate language or languages as part of their language strategies (Welch et al. 2005). Usually when a common corporate language is chosen, most meetings, reports and company documents are required to use the common corporate language (Thomas 2007).

A common corporate language makes it possible for people who speak different languages to communicate with each other (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b). Choosing a common corporate language may even be inevitable, since cross-national requirements have become so obvious and compelling (ibid.). Moreover, a common corporate language not only makes communication possible, but it also enables international job mobility (Hoare 2012). Therefore, companies can hire capable candidates from any part of the world. For example, in a Swiss-based multinational corporation Nestlé, it was noted that having English as a language standard greatly improved purchasing and hiring (Neeley 2012).

Neeley (2012) introduces three reasons for standardised language policies. Firstly, there is high competition among companies that are seeking partners, customers and suppliers globally. Without foreign language skills, companies’ growth opportunities are restricted to markets where their own language is used. Secondly, companies’ resources are nowadays dispersed globally so that a common language is needed to enable efficient communication and co-operation between employees in different units and subsidiaries. A common corporate language might be the only choice. For companies considering mergers and acquisitions (M&As) across borders, a common corporate language can make the complicated process smoother. For example, an Italian company, Merloni, introduced English to create a global image of the company in the 1990s. This made it possible for Merloni to acquire British and Russian businesses. (Neeley 2012.)
There are several choices for a corporate language. Firstly, a company can choose one corporate language that is the official language of the company. A company can choose the language of its home country as the official language (van den Born & Peltokorpi 2010). This is called the parent company language (Thomas 2007). For example, a Japanese company would choose Japanese as its official language. Another choice is to use the local language, for example a language of a subsidiary (van den Born & Peltokorpi 2010). Apart from these choices, a company can choose a third language as an official language (ibid.). This is the case, if a Japanese company decides to use English in its headquarters and subsidiaries. Benefits and challenges of different language policy choices are compared in table 2.

Table 2. Benefits and challenges of different language policies (modified from Thomas 2007:85).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent company language</strong></td>
<td>+ strong corporate culture in home country</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ facilitates top-down decision-making</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– limits communication with local management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– may cause cultural conflicts between parent company and subsidiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subsidiary language</strong></td>
<td>+ access to information in foreign languages</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ improves access to foreign markets</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– may cause communication problems between employees and expatriates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– does not necessarily create a shared corporate culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– high cost of expatriate training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Common corporate language</strong></td>
<td>+ facilitates corporate-wide communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>+ feeling of global corporate culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– may restrict access to information in other languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– may restrict access to foreign markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– communication barriers for employees with limited language skills</td>
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</table>

Secondly, a company can choose to have several official languages. For example, both home country language and local country languages can be used, as well as English. Furthermore, in many cases, there is no official language strategy, but a certain language, for example English, is used in international communication. (van den Born & Peltokorpi 2010.)

According to Marschan-Piekkari et al. (1999b) having a clear language policy brings benefits such as (1) facilitating formal reporting, (2) enhancing informal communication and information flows, and (3) creating a feeling of belonging to a ‘global family’. Firstly, when a common language is defined, it facilitates access to
company documents, to keep record and to operate procedures. Secondly, information can be better conveyed from one unit to another. And finally, the sense of corporate culture and belonging to a ‘global family’ is fostered as people use the same language. (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b.)

According to Andersen and Rasmussen (2004), many issues related to communication can be overcome by choosing one or more corporate languages. They state that language is a tool for communication and an important factor for establishing relationships in international companies. Moreover, all the documents are produced in the same language and knowledge flows between HQ and subsidiaries are enhanced (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b). In addition, having a clear language policy that fits to the context seems to contribute to better knowledge transfer (Welch & Welch 2008).

There are various kinds of issues that have to be considered when choosing a corporate language. Introducing a common language might not be an easy task. One difficulty related to choosing corporate language is that, in reality, even after choosing a common corporate language, there are often several languages involved. It is argued that setting a common language does not automatically lead to its implementation. (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b.)

Neeley (2012) argues that ‘unrestricted multilingualism’ can be a problem for MNCs. If there is no language policy, documents might be written in different languages, the need for translation grows and it might not be possible to organise meetings between some units. If communication cannot be done effectively, companies faces challenges such as losing sales, difficult merger integration and slowing down productivity. (Neeley 2012.)

Moreover, a common language can be effectively adopted by the top management of a company, but it can also make the managers lose sight of the effects that language has on other people in the MNC (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b). Managers may have an illusion that their company is becoming global even though the implementation of the internationalisation strategy would not be adequately
supported (Adler & Bartholomew 1992). Language skills of managers are generally higher than most employees’ language skills (Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio 2011). This way, the top management can create a barrier for communication (Welch et al. 2005).

In different parts of the organisation, different kinds of language skills are needed (Feely & Harzing 2003). According to Barner-Rasmussen and Aarnio (2011), MNCs are multilingual but the fluency varies depending on organisational level and functions. Not all businesses need to become equally global (Adler & Bartholomew 1992).

Different language policies are used depending on companies’ home countries. MNCs from Nordic countries often use various languages within their company HQ and other departments. In a study conducted by Harzing & Pudelko (2013), none of the Nordic-based MNCs in the study used their home country language as the common corporate language. In Asian countries, companies very seldom have English as the common language, only 16 per cent of the companies in the study having English as corporate language. For companies with Asian origin, it is common that companies have not identified any language as the corporate language. In the study, 47 per cent of companies headquartered in Asian countries had not specified a corporate language, whereas only 23 per cent of MNCs based in Anglophone countries and 12 per cent of MNCs headquartered in Nordic countries had no corporate language. (Harzing & Pudelko 2013.)

It is important to notice that even if English is chosen as the official language, it does not automatically lead to adapting a global mind-set (Disco Inc 2012a). Even in a situation in which English is the official language of a company, the mother tongue of employees plays an important role in inter-unit communication (Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999a). While it is often necessary for a MNC to have a common corporate language, it is not sufficient alone (Piekkari & Zander 2005). For successful international management, other things such as hiring people with language skills, corporate training, rotation of employees internationally and using multinational teams and expatriates are necessary, too (ibid). A common corporate
language can be a step towards more effective international communication but it might not be a solution as such and can create problems (Welch et al. 2005).

According to Charles (2007), choosing a corporate language is a complicated and delicate issue. It is important to have a language strategy that suits the specific organisation and takes into consideration what kinds of challenges are involved in language issues (ibid.). As Poncini (2003) argues, it can be beneficial for companies to use other languages than English to make communication easier. A company may decide to use different languages in its headquarters and in subsidiaries or when expanding its businesses into new countries (Lester 1994). After choosing the right language policy, it is fundamental to effectively implement it.

3.6. Implementing a language policy

Changing a language policy in a company is usually many years’ process and more complex than most other kinds of changes (Neeley 2012). In a CNN’s interview, Neeley estimates that implementation might take 4 to 10 years (Hoare 2012). It is argued that companies’ strategies are often internationalising faster than they are implemented (Adler & Bartholomew 1992). Even after years of introducing a new language policy, it might be that it is still not fully implemented and employees still feel frustration because of the policy (Neeley 2012). In this chapter, it is discussed what kinds of issues need to be taken into account when designing and implementing a language policy.

Neeley (2012) presents four tips for implementing English as the common corporate language. Firstly, it is important to involve all employees to use and develop their language skills. Secondly, managers’ role is essential. Managers need to act as role models. Their task is to design guidelines for situations in which English is needed and to make sure that people obey the rules. Thirdly, native people need to make an effort to encourage co-workers who have lower proficiency in English. Native speakers might need to simplify their vocabulary and speak slowly. Fourthly, it is essential that non-native speakers follow the company guidelines and do not switch
to their native language in meetings so that native speakers are excluded. (Neeley 2012.)

In the process of implementing a language policy, managers’ influence cannot be overemphasised. Neeley (2012) argues that managers can use several methods for efficient implementation. For instance, managers have an important role in fostering positive attitudes. Introducing a corporate language often comes as a shock for employees and resistance can occur. While some employees feel inspired about a new language policy, there might be people who feel indifferent, frustrated or negative. Managers can encourage these employees using positive verbal persuasion and reinforcement so that employees begin to have more faith in their English capabilities. It is essential that leaders explain the reasons and the significance of the language policy. It will make it easier to get everyone involved, if employees know what they are required to do and why. (Neeley 2012.)

Furthermore, it is important that the company offers its employees opportunities to use the language (Neeley 2012). Languages can be improved at the job, and developing language skills can be part of a normal workday (ibid.). An interviewee in Neeley’s (2013:491) study mentioned that “Working in English is a very, very good way to improve our English”.

Finally, implementing a language policy is a long process in which managers play a fundamental role. Issues such as reasons for language policies, choosing the right policy for each company and department, adopting the right attitudes and offering opportunities to develop language skills need to be taken into account. In this study, the effects of using English as a common language are examined.

3.7. English as the lingua franca

Lingua franca refers to a “language used for communication among people of different mother tongues” (Collins English Dictionary 2013c). More simply put, it is the common language (Oxford English Dictionary 2013). In international business, the dominant role of English as the lingua franca has been recognised by many
authors (Charles 2007, Nickerson 2005, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999b, Harzing & Feely 2008, Neeley 2012). Since English has a remarkable role in the international business of today, it is not surprising that English has been introduced as a corporate language in many MNCs (Fredriksson et al. 2006, Neeley 2012).

Charles (2007) argues that what matters in the field of international business is ‘business English as lingua franca’. In business context, communicational skills are more important than being grammatically correct, and the aim of the speaker is “to get the job done” rather than aiming at native like speech (Charles 2007:266). It is important to be able to conduct global business regardless of different ways of speaking English. The context and the communicative requirements of each situation define the language skills that are needed in cross-cultural business situations. (Charles 2007.)

Regardless of the dominant role of English, impacts of other languages exist. Even if English is most frequently introduced as a corporate language, it is not used by native speakers only (Nickerson 2005). The way English is used as business language depends on if it is the employee’s mother tongue or not (Rogers 1998). In the international business community “English is used by first, second and foreign language speakers of English simultaneously” and occasionally together with other languages (Nickerson 2005:376–377). Piekkari and Zander (2005) argue that even though English is considered the lingua franca, the level of fluency in English varies.

In today’s business world, there are more people who speak English as a foreign language than native speakers (Charles 2007). English is spoken by people from different backgrounds, bringing their cultural backgrounds and conversational styles involved when speaking English (ibid.). In a case study conducted by Poncini (2003), using English made it possible for participants of a big multicultural meeting to communicate together but it was also helpful to use other languages occasionally. In that particular study, when smaller intercultural groups discussed among themselves, they sometimes chose German, French, Italian or Spanish instead of English, to support lack of English skills (ibid.). When communicating with people who have
different levels of fluency and comfort to speak English, it is sometimes useful to consider using other languages (ibid.).

Hofstede (2001:425) reminds that even if English is the lingua franca, it does not mean that people should not study other languages, and argues that the role of languages can be underestimated by native speakers of English. Native speakers of English, especially if they have not studied other languages, might not fully understand what kinds of difficulties non-native speakers face when communicating in English. It is possible that native speakers think that non-native speakers are able to express everything they want in English, although this is often not the case. (Hofstede 2001:425.)

Moreover, in some situations when business could be done in English, speaking another language can allow deeper mutual understanding and willingness to do business together. Even for people who have English as their mother language and who use English in business communication, it is useful to learn a foreign language. Firstly, because it helps them understand the structures of their own language, and secondly, because they get an idea of what kinds of difficulties non-native English speaker have when using English. Therefore, even though English can be considered the lingua franca, language skills in other languages offer benefits in various business contexts. (Bloch 1995.)

To summarise, English is widely used as the common language in multinational corporations. However, it is not only about using English in business communication but to use the right language in the right place. It is not an easy task to implement an effective English language policy (Neeley 2012). It is stated that the number of companies that have implemented English as corporate language with sustainable success is still limited (ibid.). The empirical study of this research aims at contributing to better understanding of effective use of English in MNCs. To examine the situation, a theoretical framework is provided.
3.8. Theoretical framework

In chapter 3, it has been discussed what is the role of language skills in international business. Moreover, language policies have been examined. Now, theoretical findings are combined to form a theoretical framework to analyse empirical findings. Three issues are covered including language skills as a part of cross-cultural communication skills, effects of English on job performance and company strategy to support effective use of English.

Using English at workplace has effects on individual level and company level (Charles 2007). The aim of this study is to examine what kinds of effects it brings to use English at workplace. First, it is examined what kinds of effects language skills bring on individual level. Using the first sub-question *What is the role of language skills in cross-cultural business communication?*, it is discussed what are intercultural business communication skills.

![Figure 3. Cross-cultural business communication skills.](image)

Figure 3 illustrates four factors that contribute to effective cross-cultural business communication. Language skills can be seen as one part of successful cross-cultural
business communication skills. Cultural understanding means knowledge about different cultures that can be gained through cultural studies or experience abroad. Conversational skills mean capabilities to negotiate and take part in conversation in different kinds of situations. Business-related skills refer to knowledge of industry and products gained through work experience and education.

Figure 4. Effects of language skills on job performance in MNCs.

It is argued that language skills can contribute to career enhancement (Bloch 1995). Figure 4 puts together topics discussed in the literature review, illustrating how language skills can affect individuals’ job performance in multinational corporations. Firstly, it is stated that language skills affect career opportunities. Positive effects include enabling recruitment, promotion, delivering more power to linguistically skilled employees, new work tasks or overseas assignments. On the other hand, employees with poor language skills might not be offered these opportunities, creating a barrier for them. Secondly, language skills have indirect effects on job performance such as contributing to better cultural awareness and intellectual growth (Bloch 1995). Negative effects have to be taken into account as well, since people might feel disqualified and afraid of speaking English because of poor language
skills, as a result of underestimating one’s language skills (Neeley 2012). In these situations people’s job performance can be negatively affected.

On company level, this study aims at illustrating how the company strategy can support effective use of English. It has been discussed in chapter 3 that language issues have to be carefully considered in company strategy. Companies have several choices for language policies. In figure 5, a framework is designed based on Neeley’s (2012) suggestions for implementing a language policy. The figure emphasises two issues: firstly, the importance of involving all employees, and secondly, the role of managers.

In the next chapter, methodology of the empirical research is explained, followed by analysing empirical data findings in chapter 5. The empirical part is constructed considering the theoretical framework presented in this chapter.

<table>
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<th>Language policy</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>- everyone to develop language skills</td>
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<td>- common goals</td>
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<td>- offering opportunities to develop and use language skills</td>
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<td>- native and non-native speakers</td>
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Figure 5. Effective implementation of a language policy (modified from Neeley 2012:121–123).
4. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Data collection methods

This study presents a qualitative study. The focus of qualitative research is to describe real life. In a qualitative research, the aim is to find out something new rather than verifying existing statements. The results of qualitative research give explanations for some phenomenon in a specific place and during specific time. (Hirsjärvi et al. 1998:161.)

Daymon and Holloway (2011:6) argue that qualitative research method is particularly suitable for research examining communication, since communication is related to people’s experience and social context, and is therefore complex and human. In this case, qualitative research is chosen to provide a deeper understanding of the effects of using English at workplace. The purpose of the research method is to provide descriptive information about the way people feel using English affects communication, job performance and company strategy.

The research method can be called abductive. When using abductive approach, the theoretical framework of the study can be modified during the collection of empirical data. This is particularly suitable for studies in which the objective is to discover something new. In abductive research, the research questions, hypotheses and empirical data are constantly compared with each other. (Dubois & Gadde 2002.)

In the empirical part, two types of data collection methods were used. Firstly, information was collected through three in-depth interviews from three different Japanese-based multinational corporations. To get a wider picture of the situation, information was then collected through a questionnaire from two different companies. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:38) state that using several research methods can help the researcher to discover different kinds of perspectives about the topic. In addition, it can contribute to better reliability of the study (ibid.). More precisely, Yin (1989:90) argues that it is beneficial for certain kind of studies to integrate interviews and surveys as a research method. This way, interviews provide in-depth insight about
the situation and then a survey is used to ensure the frequency of the phenomenon (Yin 1989:90).

The interviews and the questionnaires were used as the source of primary data, meaning that the data was collected by the researcher for the use of this study exclusively (Hirsjärvi et al. 1998:185). Secondary data of the companies was collected using the company webpages and reports. Because the company names are not mentioned in the study for confidentiality reasons, details of the companies are not revealed. According to Hirsjärvi et al. (1998:185), secondary data refers to data that already exists and is originally created or collected by someone else for other purposes. Using secondary data can contribute to answering the research question (ibid.).

The participants of the interviews considered that anonymity would be the only choice that would allow them to express their opinions freely. Because of the anonymity, names of the companies or names of the participants are not mentioned. Only limited background information of the companies is disclosed.

4.2. Interviews

In this study, the interviews were focused interviews, meaning that the questions were formulated before the interviews, but it was also possible to discuss related issues that were not mentioned in the agenda (Yin 1989:89). In this kind of semi-structured interviews, it is common that some themes of the interviews are decided beforehand but the interview remains open-ended (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000:47–48). The outline of the interviews is described in appendix 1. In the actual interviews, the order and the phrasing of questions could be adjusted to fit the particular situation. Semi-structured interviews were chosen in order to get a broader picture of the topic and to provide flexibility that would allow participants to express their ideas. During semi-constructed interviews, it is important that the interview remains conversational, natural and relaxed (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000:96).
Each of the interviews took from 30 minutes up to one hour. For a comprehensive analysis, the interviews were videotaped, and transcribed after the interviews. As Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:75) argue, recording the interviews is necessary for qualitative analysis. Using video and voice recording, the different elements of conversation such as gestures and pauses could be recorded (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 200:92). This also allows natural conversation without the need of writing notes during the interviews (ibid.).

The interviews were conducted in English, although invitations and information about the research were sent both in Japanese and English (appendices 2 and 3), as the Japanese version was translated by a Japanese research assistant, and invitations were sent through networks of a Tohoku University teacher. When designing invitations, a formal and polite writing style was considered most suitable. Sending information through existing networks was important because personal contacts were perceived an effective way to reach participants.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:48) argue that language has a big effect in interviews. Interviewees might be able to convey more information if they are allowed to use their native language (Piekkari & Welch 2006). Neither the native language of the interviewer or that of the interviewees was English. However, it was considered that using English would be beneficial as it was the common language that both the interviewees and the interviewer could speak. Moreover, as the research topic is related to the effects of English, it was considered that speaking English during the interview might help people to think of the effects of English.

In the interview, two types of questions were asked including questions related to facts such as company policy, and questions related to interviewees’ experiences and feelings. Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:106) emphasise that it is important to decide what kind of knowledge the researcher is looking for. In this research, the emphasis was on collecting information about interviewees’ experiences and feelings rather than pure facts.
The interviews started with relatively easy questions such as “In what kinds of situations do you use English at your workplace?”. Introductory questions were related to the company policy. After that, two main topics were discussed. Firstly, the interviewees were asked about the effects of using English that they had noticed at their work. The interviewees were encouraged to give examples and to explain situations they had faced. Secondly, their opinions about language policies in general in Japanese companies were asked. At the end, the interviewer summarised the answers in order confirm that both parties had understood the answers in the same way.

4.3. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed after conducting the interviews as it became clear that having more participants would enhance the reliability of the research. Creating a questionnaire was considered a better choice than conducting more interviews, as it seemed difficult to get people take more than 30 minutes’ time during working hours. Since answering the questionnaire would take less time than an interview, it was suggested that a questionnaire would be used instead. Hirsjärvi et al. (1998:191) argue that a questionnaire is useful in these kinds of situations because it makes it possible to get information from many people. It is also considered a cost-efficient data collection method (ibid.). Therefore, a questionnaire was designed and sent to two companies. This way, more people could participate in the research.

In a questionnaire, it is important that the design of the questions is neutral and that the questions are related to the participant’s experience (Alasuutari 2011:110). Moreover, all the participants are asked exactly the same questions (Hirsjärvi et al. 1998:189). Since participants are expected to give first-hand information, it can be considered that the information is reliable (Alasuutari 2011:110). In a questionnaire, it is common that people’s attitudes, ways of thinking and behaviour are asked. Different types of questions can be asked including questions related to the participant as an individual and questions that are related to the participant’s social environment (Alasuutari 2011:110–111). In this questionnaire, some of the questions were related to participant’s own experience, some of them were related to their company, and some of them were related to Japanese companies in general. If
many of the participants describe a similar phenomenon, the information can be considered reliable (Alasuutari 2011:111–112).

The questionnaire was tested both in paper version and online version in order to make sure that questions were clear enough to be understood. Finally, an online version of the questionnaire was sent to two companies. The questionnaire was only available in English. This was seen as the best alternative, as having a Japanese version would have required more resources and a translation from Japanese to English before analysing. During translation, some of the valuable information could have been lost. The questionnaire was sent in summer and autumn 2013.

In the questionnaire similar questions were asked as during the interviews (appendix 4). As the questionnaire was designed after the interviews, the questions could be formulated more precisely. At the beginning of the questionnaire, respondents were given background information about the purpose of the research. It was emphasised that their names and the names of their companies will not be mentioned in the study.

The questionnaire included 20 questions that were divided into eight sections described in table 3. Multiple choice questions were used. In many cases, multiple answers were accepted, and the participants could select an alternative ‘other’ and write their own answers. At the end of the questionnaire, space for comments and ideas was offered. For possible future contacts, participant’s e-mail address was asked.

It is argued that both open-ended and multiple choice questions can be beneficial depending on the situation (Foddy 1995:128). In this research, it was considered that using multiple choice questions would be beneficial, as they are simpler and less time-consuming for the participants to answer (ibid.). Moreover, it is easy to compare respondents’ answers and to analyse the results (ibid.).
Table 3. Questionnaire outline.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Questionnaire sections</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Background information</td>
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<td>2. Situations in which English is used</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. English and my company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My experience of using English</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Having English as the official language</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Japanese companies and English</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. English skills at workplace</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Comments</td>
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</table>

4.4. Selection of the participants

Three people participated in the interviews and 14 people answered the questionnaire. The participants were selected from four Japanese-based multinational corporations, called companies A, B, C and D in this study. Three people from companies A, B and C participated in the interviews, and 14 people from companies C and D took part in the questionnaire. Secondary data was collected using company webpages and reports. To ensure confidentiality, individual and company names are not mentioned in the study. However, as it was considered that the industry of the company might affect the way English is used in the company, some background information about the companies is presented.

All four companies were selected from different business domains including an optical instruments company (company A), a motor vehicle company (company B), an electronics company (company C) and an internet service company (company D). All of the companies are among the biggest in the world in their own business fields.
Companies A, B and C are listed in Nikkei 225 that is a stock market index in Tokyo Stock Exchange (Nikkei Inc. 2013). Company D is also listed in Tokyo Stock Exchange, and is an interesting case to look at, since the company has English as their common corporate language.

Company A is manufacturing and selling optical instruments including imaging products, precision equipment and various kinds of instruments for medical and industrial purposes. In 2013, company A had subsidiaries in Asia, Europe, North America, Latin America and Australia. Foreign sales accounted for 85 per cent of the company’s sales in the fiscal year that ended in March, 2013, biggest markets being Europe, the United States and Japan. The company’s first foreign subsidiary was established in the 1950s.

Company B is producing and selling automobiles and other motor vehicles. It has manufacturing in Asia, Europe, Africa, North America, Latin America and Australia. Most of the company B’s revenues come from its domestic markets in Japan, followed by North America (2013). The company has started its international operations in the 1950s.

Company C is an electronic product manufacturer and seller. The company has major subsidiaries in Asia, North America, Latin America and Europe. In 2012, domestic markets sales accounted for a half of the company’s sales, followed by other Asian countries. Overseas operations of the company C started in the 1950s.

Company D is focusing on internet services and financing. The company was established in the 1990s and it only started its first international operations at the end of the first decade of the 2000s. A few years ago, the company implemented English as the only official language of the company. The aim of the company is to become ‘truly global’ and it is currently expanding its businesses world-wide. In 2012, the company had subsidiaries in Asia, Europe and North America.
4.5. Data analysing methods

4.5.1. Interviews

Interviews often provide rich and profound data for analysis (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000:135–138). Because of the qualitative nature of the data, analysis can take a long time and require considering several analysing methods (ibid.). When using interviews as a research method, it is typical that the interviews are transcribed before the actual analysis (ibid.). In this research, literal transcription was used as the basis for analysing the results of the interviews. After that, there were several stages in the data analysing process.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000:144) present three phases of data analysis including descriptive analysis, categorization, and linking the results together. First, data is described taking contextual factors into account. This phase helps the researcher understand the phenomenon. Then, the data is categorized around themes that come up. Finally, the data results are combined together. The goal of the final stage is to view the situation from different perspectives in order to examine the situation using theoretical models presented earlier in the study. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000:145–150.)

In this study, the data findings were categorized after transcription of the interviews. The most significant themes that came up were finally indicated as four main themes including (1) reasons to use English in Japan, (2) opportunities and challenges, (3) how to respond to challenges and (4) effects of culture. Other themes such as ideal situation of using English, how to develop English language skills, motivation to speak English, future aspects and level of English language skills did not end up as their own topics in the final data analysis but were included in the four main themes. It is argued that themes are often re-evaluated and re-organised during the analysis process (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000:148–149).

First, every interview was analysed separately, followed by analysing the questionnaire results. Finally, to create a better understanding of the effects of
English in Japanese-based MNCs, the data findings of the interviews and the questionnaire were analysed together.

4.5.2. Questionnaire

When analysing results of a questionnaire, it is analysed how different answers are linked to each other within or between groups of participants (Alasuutari 2011:110–111). In this questionnaire, people were asked about their experiences of using English and the language policies of their companies. When analysing the results, the responses from the two companies were compared with each other.

Alasuutari (2011:203) argues that it is possible to analyse qualitative research with some quantitative measures. This is particularly applicable, if a questionnaire is used a data collection method, although pure quantitative analysis is usually not possible because of the restricted amount of cases (ibid.). When analysing a qualitative study, it is important not to make generalisations beyond the group of people that the empirical date represents (Alasuutari 2011:211). The most important point is that the theoretical framework of the study is applicable to the specific empirical data that is analysed (Alasuutari 2011:212).

Qualitative and quantitative analysis can support each other in qualitative research (Alasuutari 2011:214). For example, tables and figures can be used to present data findings in a simple form in qualitative research (Alasuutari 2011:193). In this study, most significant findings of the questionnaire are presented with figures. The figures illustrate the importance and frequency of the specific themes discussed. In addition to figures, the responses are explained in the text.

Empirical data findings are analysed in chapter 5. The chapter starts with analysing the interviews and continues with analysing the main findings of the questionnaire. After that, the data findings of the interviews and the questionnaire are combined together and analysed using the theoretical framework of this study.
5. ENGLISH IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN JAPANESE COMPANIES

5.1. Interviews

Three interviews were conducted in companies A, B and C - one interview in each company. Participants held managerial or senior positions in global human resources or personnel departments of the companies. Because of their positions in the companies, it was considered that they would have some perspective and experiences about the effects of using English at workplace. Another criterion for choosing the interviewees was that the respondents were often using English or had been using English in the company. Interviewees in companies B and C are Japanese and speak Japanese as their native language. Company A interviewee is a foreign citizen, non-native English speaker who is working in Japan but mainly using English at workplace. Company B and C interviewees have overseas experiences and use both English and Japanese at workplace in Japan. Both Japanese and foreign employees of Japanese companies were chosen to provide a wider understanding of the research topic. The interviews were conducted in English, in Japan in summer 2013.

In this part, the three interviews are first analysed separately and then together with the results of the questionnaire. After the interviews were transcribed, the themes that came out were categorised into different groups. Four themes came up including (1) reasons to use English, (2) challenges and opportunities, (3) how to respond to challenges and (4) influence of culture.

5.2. Interview A

5.2.1. Reasons to use English in Japan

Firstly, the interviewee was asked to tell about the current situation of using English in company A. The interviewee explained that English is required when communicating with group companies since most of the company A’s sales come from foreign countries. Moreover, the company’s aim is to become global and to
create a global talent pool – to make it possible, English has to be used. In company A, some foreign employees are hired in Japan to promote using English more. On ideological level, the company is promoting using more English in Japan. The company has willingness to go global.

However, the interviewee tells that there is no system that would enforce people to speak English. You get extra points for promotion if your English score is high enough. English training programme is offered weekly on managerial level, but the number of participants is limited, and being during the working hours, people can decide to skip the class when they are busy or tired. So on the ideological level, using English is promoted but Japanese is still used in many situations.

“I mean some people are very positive, but I don’t see them to emerge themselves in concrete actions, to speak [English] more and more. They always shift to Japanese, I mean in the meetings we are - participants who can speak both Japanese and English, insist talking in Japanese, because they feel more comfortable, I mean they don’t make the efforts to other people to feel comfortable.” (Company A respondent)

The interviewee states that since English is the global language, English language skills are essential. In global-oriented positions people have to use English. However, there are domestic jobs in which English language skills might not be needed. Therefore, it is not necessary that everyone in the company speaks English – it depends on the department and on the job. On the other hand, the opportunities that English skills give, such as to learn and experience something new, should make learning English appealing for everyone.

The interviewee mentions that there are different kinds of views about the best way of using English in company A. Some people see it important to use more English, and some people think that Japanese language should be used in a Japanese company.

"There're people that think that we’re a Japanese company and that we shouldn’t use English, we should talk in Japanese.” (Company A respondent)
5.2.2. Opportunities and challenges

In the interview it is discussed that in addition to the fact that using English is necessary, it is also beneficial. For the company, it creates cross-cultural mobility. For individuals, English skills can contribute to getting promoted and getting opportunities to participate in overseas assignments. The interviewee also mentions that if employees can speak English, they will have opportunities to learn more, open their minds, get new experiences and get information from different sources. English skills will also make their lives easier if they get assigned overseas.

On the other hand, using English causes some challenges for company A. The interviewee mentions that lack of language skills is causing misunderstandings, stress and losing of time, as well as frustration for Japanese and foreign employees. The interviewee mentions that even though many people really want to communicate in English, they are shy to start speaking. The interviewee mentions that people would like to be perfect and that they say they cannot speak English. The interviewee reminds that this is problematic for most non-native speakers as it is harder to express one’s ideas as clearly as you would like to in another language.

“It feels sometimes that you want to say something but you don’t really say it that beautifully or how you want to say it.” (Company A respondent)

The interviewee says that another problem is setting certain criteria for language skills. If English is required for promotion, people who do not have good language skills can feel pressure and frustrated because their English skills can hinder their possibilities to get promoted. Joining global training programmes might not be possible. Then again, it is also problematic if people are sent to overseas assignments without proper language training. The company faces a difficult situation, since while there are some young Japanese people who have international experience and good language skills, there are other people who could bring value to the company but have poor language skills.

“It’s a pity because we have very good people in the company, they are devoted, hard-working, but it’s a kind of, they don’t speak English, so I really think we
should not penalise these people just because they don’t speak [English].”
(Company A respondent)

The interviewee sees the English education in Japanese schools as the background for poor conversational skills. The interviewee points out that Japanese employees’ reading skills in English are high, while using English in professional context such as writing e-mails and summarising meetings cause a lot of difficulties. In meetings, the discussion often shifts into Japanese. Discussion, conversation and creative writing are not practised in schools. Moreover, it is discussed that having language tests such as TOEIC does not guarantee developing language skills because real-life communication skills are not tested. Tests also bring a problem that people study English only to pass the exam.

The interviewee considers it a pity that, at the moment, it seems difficult to build a bilingual working environment in Japan that would promote cross-cultural mobility and allow more foreign people to work in Japanese companies in Japan.

5.2.3. How to respond to the challenges

In addition to reforming English language education and not relying on language tests so much, the interviewee calls for more commitment to self-learning on individual level. The interviewee mentions that it is not only the company who should pay for the language education but employees should find ways to learn on their own. Another point is to have companies to put more effort making people feel comfortable using English. It should be stimulated that people would use more English at workplace. The interviewee suggests collective objectives for departments to be set, so that everyone in the department would get involved in achieving common goals in order to improve language skills. Moreover, some criteria for language skills, although not too high, should be introduced when hiring people.

The interviewee reminds that as Japanese companies are going global anyway, it would be important to practise language skills so that language would not be the issue that is making communication impossible when doing international business.
“To have [the company] becoming a real global company, learning English, people will try to understand the western way of thinking, not just the language.” (Company A respondent)

5.2.4. Effects of culture

The interviewee says that Japanese culture has an influence on the communication style also when speaking English. As Japan is a high-context culture, not everything is spoken. Moreover, it is hard for Japanese people to say ‘no’. The interviewee tells that foreigners face difficulties because they do not understand when Japanese people are saying ‘no’ indirectly. As an example, a phrase ‘I will think about it’, meaning ‘Good idea, but impossible’ is mentioned. Even if the interviewee understands the words, the meaning might be hard to understand.

“I mean, if I understand the language, I don’t understand the meaning. It’s not about you speak the language, you’ll have to think the language. You will have to know how to use the language. Like, many colleagues, not only Japanese, but from other countries, they speak English fluently, but they don’t really understand English. So, that’s a different thing.” (Company A respondent)

As a foreigner coming from a low-context culture, the interviewee sometimes feels being too direct and straight-forward. In Japan, you have to be careful not to make another person to lose face. The interviewee feels that it is important not to give negative feedback too directly because people take it very personally.

The interviewee suggests that it would be good for foreigners to learn about Japanese communication style. The interviewee reminds that it is not only about Japanese people going abroad but foreigners to come to Japan and to understand Japanese culture. For foreigners, it is much easier to work in Japan if they speak Japanese. However, the interviewee reminds that Japanese language is not easy to learn, especially because of the Chinese characters, ‘kanji’. Moreover, the interviewee says that you have to keep in mind that Japanese is only spoken in Japan, and the number of people who speak Japanese is very few compared to how many people speak English.
5.3. Interview B

5.3.1. Reasons to use English in Japan

According to company B interviewee, the reason to use English in the company is communicating with foreigners. In company B, there are foreign people working in Japanese departments so that English is required when communicating with them at the office in Japan. In most international contacts, English is the common language, although some other languages are also used, for instance Chinese is used with some Chinese contacts. The interviewee states that, nowadays, people in all functions have to communicate with foreign affiliates. Moreover, the interviewee mentions that some of the internal meetings have become bilingual, meaning that participants speak in English and memos are provided both in English and Japanese.

“In Japanese companies that do business with foreign countries, we have to use English more and more.” (Company B respondent)

The interviewee sees that the company wants its employees to use English more and more. People are encouraged to enrol self-training activities to improve their English language skills. However, the company does not provide money directly for language education.

It is mentioned that despite of global presence, the company is still seen as a very Japanese company. The interviewee says that it would not be good to have English as the only official language of the company if people’s language skills are not very high. If everyone could speak good English, it would be no problem to have English as an official language. But if many employees have poor language skills and are required to use English, there can be misunderstandings and no great outcome can be expected.
5.3.2. Opportunities and challenges

The interviewee mentions several benefits that using English brings. On company level, using English makes it possible to communicate with foreign affiliates. On individual level, English language skills can bring employees more responsibility. Certain score on TOEIC test is required for promotion in company B. Therefore, English skills also contribute to people’s chances to get promoted.

The interviewee mentions that people try to use English with foreigners. Unfortunately, however, not everybody can speak English.

“So hard to the employee - hard to speak English. Higher and higher. So the company thinks we have to speak English more and more.” (Company B respondent)

Many people can read English very well, but they hesitate to speak because they feel that their language skills are not high enough. Sometimes people try to escape situations in which they should use English. The interviewee feels that lack of English skills causes misunderstandings and slows down conversation. Because of difficulties to use a foreign language, it might be hard to make other people understand one’s message as intended.

“I can’t convey my real intention.” (Company B respondent)

The interviewee feels that English language tests do not guarantee language skills. High TOEIC score is not enough, because the language has to be used and practised. The interviewee mentions that in their current job, English is not needed much. Therefore, it is hard to come up with the right words when you have to change the language into English.

Moreover, the interviewee mentions that Japanese language is completely different than English, while some languages are more similar, making it hard for Japanese people to learn English. However, Chinese and Korean people still have higher test scores even though their languages are not similar to English either.
“Grammar is... Some other languages are very close to English, but completely different, Japanese and English. So, not easy. -- But Chinese or Korean, many Korean can speak English very well, better than the Japanese, so, hm... I don’t know why...” (Company B respondent)

One of the difficulties related to English language is that when there are one or few foreigners among many Japanese people, the language may shift into Japanese. The interviewee feels that situations that are most difficult for Japanese people are big meetings, for example with 20 to 30 people, where common debate or discussion is expected. This is also related to cultural issues.

5.3.3. How to respond to the challenges

The interviewee feels that English is definitely used more than before in company B. To develop language skills, the interviewee suggests that self-learning activities and experience in foreign countries will help. The situation might be becoming easier all the time, since it seems that recently hired graduates have higher language skills than before.

5.3.4. Effects of culture

The interviewee mentions that not all problems are related to language issues but business practices that vary in different countries. For example in the United States, it is common to have debates, whereas in Japan, people are not used to taking part in discussion in that kind of negotiations.

“- - discussion among big party. That, probably, most of Japanese don’t like it. Not only in English but even in Japanese.” (Company B respondent)

Moreover, it is argued that some things are communicated differently in English and in Japanese. In Japan, the listener is expected to read between the lines, but in English this might not be possible.

“So, English is, how to say, very simple - Japanese is very subtle.” (Company B respondent)
5.4. Interview C

5.4.1. Reasons to use English in Japan

Company C interviewee mentions that in the company’s global operations, English is most frequently used as the common language. The company has a long history of overseas operations, but recently changes have occurred. For example, in Taiwan, Japanese fluency was expected for promotion of Taiwanese employees, but nowadays English language skills are more important. Only China still is exceptional. In China, Chinese is still the most important communication tool. In most other subsidiaries English is used.

“Today, very different. Among young people, if we try to hire good employees, they don’t speak Japanese, [they] speak English. So, the time is different.”
(Company C respondent)

The interviewee says that since a few years, many documents such as worker conditions, handbooks and intranet are provided both in Japanese and English because there are non-Japanese people working in Japan. In meetings, English is used if non-Japanese speakers attend it. Translators translate for the non-Japanese speaking people and English versions of documents are provided.

Moreover, there is a minimum requirement for promotion candidates based on TOEIC test and a minimum requirement to get overseas assignments. There is no minimum requirement for hiring people but they can be asked to improve their level of English before entering the company.

The company partly subsidises language courses for its managers and other employees. For overseas assignees and their families, language courses are paid by the company. The interviewee sees that it is no longer necessary for the company to provide so many language courses, since people study on their own in private language schools or via internet.
Most of company C’s products are made outside of Japan nowadays. Therefore, even in domestic sales department, English is needed. Even though there are more people who speak Chinese as their mother language than native English speakers, the language in which most people can communicate is English.

“Therefore, English is a very important communication tool.” (Company C respondent)

The interviewee sees that in some departments English is now used more than before, but not in every department of the company. The interviewee argues that since English is the common language globally, everybody in the company should be able to use English at least at minimum level.

5.4.2. Opportunities and challenges

The interviewee considers that English language skills offer some benefits for employees. Employees’ opportunities are expanded if they can speak English. For example, employees can get promoted or get overseas assignments.

There are also some challenges involved with English language policies. Firstly, while English skills are important, the company cannot set the criteria for new graduates too high, since less people would like to join the company. Secondly, the interviewee reminds that communication situations are context-related. If people are familiar with same products and issues, it will be easy for them to discuss about those topics, even if their language skills are not so high. On the other hand, if the situation is new for either one or both of the speakers, it will be very hard for them to understand each other if their language skills are not high.

When English is used as the common language for international business, it is sometimes hard to understand each other regardless of speaking the same language. The interviewee mentions that there are many ways of speaking English, for instance Chinese English, Singaporean English and Indian English. Especially, some pronunciation of English influenced by British English can be hard to understand.
5.4.3. How to respond to challenges

The interviewee reminds that English skills need to be practised - because if you do not use English, you do not remember English vocabulary. To speak English, you need to change your mind-set into English. This is not easy if you only use English occasionally.

The interviewee suggests that English practise hours would help the problem of forgetting English vocabulary when not using it. If English was practised for instance for one hour in the morning, it would be easier to use English after that. The interviewee says that in order to learn English, it is important to practise because communication skills are learnt in actual situations.

The interviewee mentions one benefit related to English language policies. If English is the common corporate language, people are forced to use English all the time, to “practise” it, and it will be easier for them to speak English in real situations. The interviewee feels that improving and practising English is important, but there is no need to speak English when Japanese people communicate with each other. Therefore, having English as the only official language has its advantages but it hinders communication if Japanese people have to communicate in English in a situation in which they could actually understand each other better in Japanese. The interviewee sees that the ideal situation of using English is to have it as one of the official languages.

“If we talk Japanese and Japanese, why we speak English? I feel strange.”
(Company C respondent)

5.4.4. Effects of culture

Company C interviewee mentions that cultural issues are always involved in international business communication.
“Communication is not only English, or language skills. Background or social background, many things, so. Therefore, very difficult, not only language.” (Company C respondent)

“Cultural communication is very important.” (Company C respondent)

In Japanese communication style, Japanese people can use short sentences to communicate, and questions can be left open-ended. It is expected that the listener will understand the true intention. One word can convey a lot of information, whereas in English language more explanation is needed. Very often, Japanese people should explain more when they speak English. The interviewee mentions that sometimes people translate their saying into English based on their native language, and it can leave the listener without context to understand the real meaning. Japanese people sometimes tend to rely on Japanese communication style even though they speak English. Foreigners might not understand the meaning of Japanese employees’ words even though their speaking was grammatically correct. The interviewee mentions a situation that occurred with an American manager. The American manager said:

“I don’t understand what you say. - - I don’t say your English is wrong. Your saying’s content is big, I don’t understand, I don’t catch what you say.” (Company C respondent)

Another problem is related to translation of some vocabulary. For example, in Japan, the word ‘bonus’ means a big amount of money that many companies give to all employees twice a year. In contrast, in some other countries ‘bonus’ is given based on individual performance. Another word is ‘manager’, or ‘kachuo’ in Japanese, that in Japan refers to a person promoted to a managerial position after about 15 years’ of experience in a company.

5.5. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was sent to two companies, to company C and to company D. Eight answers were received from company C and six answers from company D, meaning that altogether 14 answers were analysed. Company C participated both in
the interview study and in the questionnaire, and one of the company C participants was also one of the interviewees. The native language of all the respondents was Japanese, but company D has English as the official language of the company. The respondents answered the multiple-choice questionnaire online and were able to add their comments after each question and at the end of the survey. In this section, the answers from the two companies are analysed together and compared with each other in cases in which differences occurred.

In company C, the interviewees worked in different departments of the company in Japan and held managerial or senior positions. Most of company C respondents were using English at least occasionally except for one participant not using English in their job at all. In company D, the participants held positions related to global human resources. Most of the company C respondents (6/8) had been working in the company for more than 20 years, one of them for 10–20 years and one of them 5–10 years. In company D, only one of the respondents had been working in the company longer than 5 years, two of them had been working there for 2–5 years, and three workers had just started within the last two years.

5.5.1 Reasons to use English

In company C, all the respondents reported that they work in a department where everybody speaks Japanese. In company D, only one respondent said that everybody speaks Japanese in their department or every day workplace. In company D, most people answered that less than 10 percent or 10–20 percent were non-Japanese speakers. In the case of the company C, all the respondents said that the only reason to use English was communicating with foreigners who do not speak Japanese. In company D, respondents also mentioned other reasons for using English. In addition to speaking with foreigners, people said they used English because the company regulations required it, and because the company is creating an image of a global company.

However, in both companies all the respondents who used English at their work mentioned a long list of tasks in which they had to use English at work. Most
common tasks in which English language was required included meetings in Japan, sending e-mail to and talking face-to-face with foreigners, business trips, reading documents in English as well as writing documents or reports in English.

Respondents were asked how important for the future of their company it is to use English (table 4). In company C, most of the respondents considered that using English was important for the future of their company but not among the top priorities. Two respondents said using English is one of the most important things, and one considered that using English was not a very important issue. In company D, in contrast, everyone except for one respondent considered English one of the most important things in the future.

Table 4. Importance of English for the future of my company.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Company C (responses/8)</th>
<th>Company D (responses/6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of the most important things</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important but not among the first priorities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very important</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the questionnaire, people were asked in which departments they considered it important to use English. Six respondents said it is important to use English in all departments. The rest of the respondents listed some departments, mostly including headquarters, sales and marketing, exporting and engineering.

When people were asked about their attitudes towards using English, most of the respondents reported that they felt positive or neutral (figure 6) in both companies. It was also mentioned by some people (2) that using English was a necessary part of their job, and a chance to improve English language skills (1 respondent).
Considering this question about people’s attitudes, it is important to note that the reason why so many felt positive or neutral about using English might be due to the fact people who participated in the questionnaire were people who were already using English at work, except for one respondent. Also in company D, using English has been introduced as the corporate language and is therefore promoted and part of normal work.

Next, people were asked how willing they are to use English at work (figure 7). Most of the respondents (7) said they were somewhat willing to use English or very willing to use English (4). There were two people, one from each company, who preferred not to use English but were required to do so. One person from company C answered that he did not want to use English. On the other hand, one of the respondents in company C who did not have the opportunity to use English at his current job said he would be “very willing to use English”.

![Motivation to use English](image)
When respondents were asked to describe the attitude towards English in their companies, most of company C respondents (7) told the atmosphere was ‘somewhat encouraging’, one of them described it as ‘very encouraging’ and one of them as ‘indifferent’. In company D, two people said the atmosphere was ‘very encouraging”, three people considered it ‘somewhat encouraging’ and one of them as ‘indifferent’.

Differences can be seen between companies C and D regarding the question of how much English is used (figures 8 and 9). Respondents were asked if they feel that English is now used more in their company than before. The answers from respondents from company C varied a lot, half of the people considering that the situation had not changed much, and three of them saying the opposite: English is used much more than before. In company D, most of the answers indicated that English is used much more now than before. This can be considered natural, as the company introduced English as the corporate language a few years ago.

![Company C - Do you feel that English is now used more in your company than before?](image)

Figure 8. Company C – current situation of using English.
5.5.2. Benefits and challenges

The respondents were asked about the benefits that English language skills offer them in their company (figure 10). Most of the respondents (11) said that language skills can offer them possibilities to go abroad. It was also reported that if employees can speak English, they can have the opportunity to get assigned for different kinds of work tasks (9 respondents). More than half of the respondents reported that language skills can contribute to promotion. Four people said that English language skills give self-confidence, and two of the respondents mentioned that it is possible to gain other employees’ respect if they can speak English. One of the respondents added that being able to speak English makes it is easier to understand Japanese (culture or language).

Most respondents reported that using English brings some difficulties for employees in Japanese companies (figure 11). When they were asked what kind of difficulties
What kinds of benefits does it bring for you in your company if you can speak English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities to go abroad</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting assigned to different kinds of tasks</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confidence</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding own culture</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10. Benefits of English language skills.

What kinds of difficulties have you faced when communicating in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties to understand others</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misunderstandings</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slow communication</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulties in meetings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing documents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11. Difficulties related to communication in English.
they have faced when communicating in English, most of the respondents (10) reported that using English slows down communication process and causes misunderstanding (8). Other difficulties that were mentioned by many of the respondents (4) included difficulties to understand each other, and frustration because it is hard to express what they would like to. Writing official documents in English was considered difficult by two people, and participating in conversation during meetings was mentioned by one respondent.

After asking about the difficulties that English language causes, the respondents were asked to name reasons why using English feels difficult. There were three main reasons that were mentioned by half of the respondents (7 respondents). Firstly, respondents said that they felt that their verbal language skills were not high enough. Secondly, many respondents felt that using English was difficult in situations in which they were not familiar with the vocabulary related to the topic. Thirdly, many felt that people’s accents and dialects were difficult to understand. Interestingly, none of the respondents mentioned that using English is difficult because the communication style in English is different than in their own language, although this was one of the alternatives.

5.5.3. How to respond to challenges

In the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they felt that it is important for everyone in a Japanese company to speak English. A little more than half of all the respondents (8), especially people from company D, felt that everyone in a Japanese company should speak at least some English. The rest of the respondents (6) said that only people who communicate with foreigners should speak English, this view being more common among the company C respondents.

Most of the respondents in both companies mentioned that the best policy for their company to use English would be having English as one of the official languages of the company. Only two respondents from company D and none from company C regarded the best choice to be English as the only official language. Some of company C respondents (2) replied that English could be one of the official
languages in some departments, and some (2) said that there is no need to specify the role of English language.

The respondents were also asked how they feel if they are required to communicate with their Japanese colleagues in a language other than Japanese. Five people from company C and two from company D mentioned that there is no point in speaking other languages than Japanese with Japanese colleagues. However, one of them added that it also depends on the situation. Seven people considered that using English among Japanese has both advantages and disadvantages. One of the respondents regarded it as a good way to practise English skills, and some people (3) thought it makes communication difficult. Only one of the respondents, from company D, mentioned that using English among Japanese colleagues was necessary in a global company.

The respondents were asked to imagine a situation in which English is set as the official language of their company. They were asked what kind of things would be important if their company wished to use more English (figure 12). Most of the respondents (9) said that it is important to create an atmosphere that supports people to use English. Another way to enhance effective use of English was hiring more English-speaking foreign staff in a Japanese company in Japan (9 respondents). Moreover, the language policy of the company can support using English if English is set as the official language or as one of the official languages of the company (7 respondents). Two people mentioned that setting a minimum criterion, for example an English-test such as TOEIC for new employees entering the company would be beneficial if the company wanted to use more English. One of the respondents added that creating opportunities in people’s current jobs to use English would be important. Another respondent reminded that business needs have to be taken into account when planning effective use of English.
In the last question of the survey, the respondents were asked how they have developed their language skills that they need at work. Most of the respondents (8), but not all of them, answered that they have learned English at school (primary school to university). Most of the respondents (8) had also been studying on their own, and five of them had taken English lessons in a private language school. From company C, five of the respondents had received language training offered by the company. Moreover, five of the company C respondents had also developed their language skills during overseas work experience, one of whom mentioned it as the only means of developing his language skills. One of the respondents had developed English language skills during student exchange also.

At the end of the questionnaire, an opportunity was offered to add comments. Two respondents, one from each company, used the opportunity to write their comments at the end of the questionnaire. A respondent from company C considered suggesting English as the official language of the company one-sided, since there are many countries where other languages are spoken.
“We communicate with them using French, German, Japanese, English, Chinese or any others like body-language so that we understand each other. That's why to make English as the official language in company is not the point - to think this is only the English speaker's egoistic mind.” (Respondent from company C)

“The most important point is to understand each other at any language.”
(Respondent from company C)

A respondent from company D mentioned that improving English skills is necessary and it has opportunities for Japanese companies such as making international collaboration possible and expanding business markets.

“As you may know, it is very important for many Japanese to improve their English skills, to compete with companies in other eastern Asian countries. And it helps us to collaborate with and expand opportunities in other countries.” (Respondent from company D)

However, the respondent argues that it is challenging for Japanese employees to use English in Japan because there are few foreign employees, and therefore, there is no need to use English.

“In the Japanese business society it is difficult for employees to speak English because almost all parts of staff is Japanese, so there is no necessity to speak English.” (Respondent from company D)

The respondent reminds that it is not only the companies’ job to take care of employees’ English training. A complete reform of the English education system in Japanese schools would be needed.

“The Japanese education system especially on English training does not work well.” (Respondent from company D)

Therefore, to make it possible to use English efficiently in Japanese companies, it should start from reforming education system of the country.

“You should not expect that companies in Japan have to do something for their employees.” (Respondent from company D)
To summarise the results of the questionnaire, some differences can be seen between the two companies. This was expected as the company D has English as their official language. In both companies, the difficulties and benefits associated with using English were similar and therefore analysed together.

5.6. Summary of the results

The analysis of the empirical data focuses on finding similarities and differences with the existing literature and the empirical findings of this study. The results of the interviews and the questionnaire are reflected using the theoretical framework presented in the study, and using themes that came up during the analysis. In this part, results of the interviews and the questionnaire are linked with each other and presented together.

First, reasons and importance of using English in Japanese companies is discussed. Then it is examined how language skills affect job performance and career development. Finally, suggestions about how the company strategy can support effective use of English are given based on the empirical data findings.

5.6.1. Reasons to use English

Through analysing the empirical data, it became clear that there are different opinions about the reasons of using English in Japanese companies. Most of the respondents reported that using English is necessary if Japanese companies want to compete in international markets. The main reason to use English was communicating with non-Japanese speaking people in companies A, B and C. In addition, English was used in company D because the company policy required it. For companies A, B and C, the reason to use English was practical – in these companies English is the common language used with most foreigners rather than in order to create a global image, like in company D.

Opinions about the extent of how much English should be used varied. Especially in company D, being a company that is aiming at becoming a truly global company,
having English as the official language was seen as a good way to compete internationally. However, in other companies, there were different opinions about using English. According to previous studies (Neeley 2012, Charles 2007), introducing English as the official language is a sensitive issue and can evoke strong opinions.

It seems that the global economic recession has accelerated internationalisation in Japanese companies (Disco Inc. 2012a). The findings support the notion that even though Japanese companies have long experience in over-seas assignments, the current globalisation is bringing changes. Most of the respondents considered internationalisation inevitable. Moreover, most of the respondents considered that English is the global language nowadays. For instance, according to company C guidelines, it is becoming a standard to use English also in regions where the common language used to be Japanese or another language. In company C, documentation, intranet and employees’ handbooks are now offered in both Japanese and English. This change has taken place within the last 5 years. In company B, meetings in Japan have recently become bilingual with documents being written in English.

The context is essential when defining the role of English. Japan, being the third largest economy in the world (BBC News 2013), still offers a large domestic market. Therefore, internationalisation of Japanese companies can differ from that of companies from smaller countries (Harzing & Pudelko 2013). Yoshihara (1999) states that the internationalisation of Japanese companies has traditionally relied on Japanese style management and Japanese expatriates.

All the interviewees and most of the questionnaire respondents said that English is used much more in their companies’ international operations than before, but depending on department and job description. Company B and C interviewees explained that in big companies, departments located in Japan are so large that most of the staff is Japanese, and English is only needed in relatively few internationally-oriented positions. To summarise, English is used more than before in Japanese companies but not necessarily by everyone in every department.
The respondents said that using English is important for the future of their companies, many of them considering using English as *one of the most important things* for their companies. However, it was emphasised that it is essential to introduce the right strategy of using English. Especially people from companies A, B and C think that using English should be designed to fit the business needs, and it was considered by many that not everybody needs English skills in Japanese companies, although it might be beneficial for everyone to be able to speak English. Even though language skills are not necessarily required for everyone, as Bloch (1995) argues, language skills offer opportunities that can be valuable.

Using English was considered important for internationalisation but the *implementation* of effective use of English seemed to be challenging. The respondents mentioned that they felt that they do not have all the skills that would be needed and that their companies were not doing all they could to support effective use of English. On the ideal level, using English was promoted but there were problems with implementation, as the company A interviewee illustrates. This supports the finding that the company strategy is becoming international quicker than it is implemented (Adler & Bartholomew 1992). Moreover, it is common to underestimate one’s language skills (Neeley 2012).

Respondents argue that the core of business communication is to find a way to communicate with each other, and to understand that there are *cultural differences* and various ways of communicating. As Charles (2007) argues, business English is not about but being grammatically correct but about understanding each other. As illustrated in theoretical part of the study, cross-cultural communication skills do not mean language skills only but a combination including also cultural understanding, conversational skills and business-related skills. As Hendon et al. (1996:21) argue, knowledge of different cultures is essential for intercultural communication.

Some of the respondents stated that discussing about English language policy is not the point. A few questionnaire respondents from company C mentioned that there is no need to define the role of English in the company strategy. As Harzing and Pudelko (2013) state, almost half of the companies with Asian origin have no
definition of a common corporate language. Focusing solely on English was considered one-sided by some respondents. In the theoretical part it was presented that other languages than English still play an important role (Poncini 2003). For example in China, Chinese language skills are still required. However, many of the respondents mentioned that in the global business, the language you need is English. As company C interviewee states, English is the tool that is used for international communication and is therefore important.

5.6.2. Job performance - benefits and difficulties

All the interviewees mentioned that using English has some benefits. Using English makes it possible to communicate with foreigners, since without using English, international communication would be difficult. It was considered that language skills bring benefits for individuals, most commonly promotion, possibilities to get assigned abroad and ability to perform new kinds of tasks at work. It was also mentioned that acquiring language skills enables people to discover new things and to understand their own culture better. Some respondents said that good language skills give self-confidence and respect from other employees. It was also mentioned by interviewee A that going on an overseas assignment is easier with adequate language skills.

There are many challenges related to using English. Both in the interviews and in the questionnaire, it became clear that the level of English is still not very high in many Japanese companies. Data findings about TOEFL results in Japan support this (TOEFL 2012). Although the company can do a lot to support effective use of English, the role of education system was emphasised. The respondents felt that school education does not give enough training on communicational skills that are needed in real life situations, which is also presented in previous publications (Torres 2012, Disco Inc. 2012a). The problem is also related to the popular English exams such as TOEIC or TOEFL that do not serve business needs. Company A and B interviewees argue that even a relatively high score does not guarantee good communicational skills needed at workplace.
Many of the difficulties are related to cultural issues that are involved in communication. As argued in the theoretical part, culture and language are tightly connected. In the case companies, most of the problems of using English were related to situations in which verbal language skills and negotiation skills in English were needed. The interviewees remarked that participating in a debate or a negotiation is not as common in Japan as in western countries, and therefore it was difficult in any language. Writing or reading in English was not considered very problematic, although some respondents mentioned that formal writing in English caused difficulties.

All the interviewees mentioned that the effects of Japanese culture can be seen even when speaking in English. As Peltokorpi (2007) argues, people interpret meanings based on their own culture. As Japan is a high-context culture, not everything is said verbally (Hall 1981:65–68). Company A interviewee mentioned that as a foreigner in Japan, it is common to feel that you are too straight-forward and it is hard to understand hidden hints between the lines. Company B interviewee mentioned that since Japanese and English are very different, things have to be said differently in English. Nevertheless, the company A interviewee reminded that in cross-cultural communication, it is not only about Japanese people learning English. Foreigners coming to Japan should also try to understand Japanese culture and learn some Japanese for better mutual understanding.

As Gudykunst (2003:111) argues, cross-cultural communication often causes misunderstandings. According to the empirical research of this study, most common difficulties when using English included misunderstandings and slowing down the communication process. Since people feel that communicating in English takes a lot of time, it is common to confirm things in Japanese or shift the language into Japanese if possible. Neeley (2012) argues that non-native speakers often shift to their own language because communicating is quicker and easier in people’s mother tongue. Moreover, company A and B interviewees remarked that as people feel that they cannot speak English fluently, they hesitate to speak at all.
Many of the respondents reported that people’s accents and dialects are difficult to understand when using English. It was emphasised by the respondents that business English skills do not mean being able to speak English but understanding different cultures and communication styles. Charles (2007) writes about the same thing mentioning that there are different ‘Englishes’, as people’s cultural backgrounds are involved when speaking in English. Hostede (2001:425) states that speaking a foreign language forces people to adopt a different way of thinking.

One difficulty related to using English is that language skills need to be acquired by practise and they need to be practised to be maintained (Zhao 1996). The interviewees mentioned that if English is not used regularly, it is difficult to come up with the right vocabulary and to ‘change one’s mind-set’ into English. Some of the respondents felt that they did not have enough chances to use language skills in their job.

As Welch et al. (2005) argue, people have different attitudes towards using a foreign language. Participants of this study reported different attitudes towards communicating in English and about the importance of English. As Neeley (2012) argues, employees might be afraid that English as the common corporate language makes people lose their cultural identity. Interviewee from company A mentioned that there are people who prefer Japanese companies to promote using Japanese instead of English.

It was mentioned by the interviewees that there are already highly skilled people with international experience and good language skills in Japan. It seems that new graduates have better language skills than before. The English education in Japanese schools is already undergoing changes (Mainichi Japan 2013a, 2013b). There are still challenges but some of them may be easier overcome in the future.

To summarise, the findings indicate that using English at workplace is necessary and beneficial in many ways. It also offers benefits for employees at their work. On the other hand, individuals face several challenges when speaking English at work. After
analysing the connection between using English at workplace and job performance, it is possible to examine, how language skills affect career development.

5.6.3. Language skills and career development

In all four companies, English language skills contribute to promotion. Firstly, language skills can be required for promotion, or secondly, language skills can make promotion easier. It is argued by Bloch (1995) that some managerial positions are only open to people with required language skills. Even if language skills are not compulsory for promotion, they can add points in a promotional exam. Moreover, language skills might be required for new graduates entering the company. The company can ask its employees to improve their language skills to a certain level. Therefore, language skills can contribute to promotion or create a barrier for getting promoted.

In addition to getting promoted, language skills can contribute to shaping one’s career, as is stated by Bloch (1995). It was mentioned in the theoretical part that globalisation and cultural issues have wide effects on careers nowadays (Leong & Hartung 2000:212, Bloch 1995). The findings of this study indicate that having good English language skills - or lack of language skills - can direct Japanese employees’ careers to different paths. With language skills, people might be able to participate in training abroad, get assigned overseas or get different kinds of work tasks. Therefore, their career can follow a different pattern because of English language skills.

In Neeleys’ studies (2012, 2013) interviewees felt that they had less chances for promotion and their status was lowered because of poor language skills. In this study, company A interviewee mentioned that people feel frustration because their career might not be advancing if they do not qualify the English language requirements. According to Piekkari et al. (2005), non-native speakers might feel that their professional competence is negatively affected and that they have fewer chances to get promoted than native speakers.
In Neeley’s study (2013), the emphasis is on how people feel their status is lost because of poor language skills. Lack of language skills can create a feeling of exclusion (Welch et al. 2005). Neeley (2012) also argues that people often underestimate their language skills and exaggerate the challenges related to using English. It might be that people feel that their language skills affect their careers more than in reality.

As Buchholz et al. (2006) state, new skills and qualifications are required in today’s organisations. Company A interviewee explains that there are talented people who are afraid that they cannot get promoted because of poor language skills. Company A interviewee also mentions that it is hard for people who do not speak English, as there is pressure to acquire English language skills. However, company A and C interviewees also mention that language skills can be acquired with a lot of motivation and time, and the theory supports this (Bloch 1995, Neeley 2012).

It has to be noted that language skills do not necessarily lead to promotion (Bloch 1995). In company C, one of the questionnaire respondents reported that he was very willing to use English at workplace but did not have the opportunity to use his language skills. Moreover, company B and C interviewees mentioned that, especially in the past, Japanese employees were sent to overseas assignments without proper training on language and communication skills and were expected to improve their language skills during the assignment.

To summarise, the connection between language skills and career development in Japanese companies seems strong. Language skills can enhance, direct or impede career development. Language skills do not necessarily provide career enhancement but they can contribute to and shape people’s careers in Japanese companies.

5.6.4. Company strategy to support effective use of English

Both the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents provided ideas about how the company strategy can support effective use of English. Firstly, it can be argued that the role of managers is essential. Almost all the questionnaire respondents
considered that encouraging atmosphere in the company was a main contributor to effective use of English. The company atmosphere should support employees to use and develop their language skills. In the interviews as well as in the questionnaire people hoped for company support to develop language skills needed at workplace. This is also a finding of Neeley’s (2013) study - if English language skills are needed at work, the employees hope that the company supports them.

Interviewees from companies A and C offered practical examples for creating an encouraging atmosphere to use English. For example, there could be ‘English practise times’ during office hours. Then English would be practised regularly and it would be easier to come up with the right vocabulary when needed. It was emphasised that the company could offer its employees opportunities to use and develop their language skills at their workplace. In company D, improving English skills while at work is already part of the company practices. As suggested by company A interviewee, another way is to set a common goal for the whole department to improve English skills to a certain level, and work for the goal together, encouraging others. If a criterion is set, people will be motivated to improve their language skills with the company supporting them.

It is notable that language training offered by the company is not the only way how the company can support its employees to develop their English skills. While few people mentioned that language training in the company is important, many of the participants said that it is not the company’s responsibility to pay for the language training of their employees. It is emphasised that employees can acquire necessary English skills on their own with self-study activities. The participants mentioned private language schools, overseas experience, student exchange and online-learning as effective methods to learn English.

All the interviewees mentioned that practising communication skills is the key to learn English skills that are needed workplace. As Zhao (1996) argues, cross-cultural communication skills are learned by practical experience. Neeley’s (2012) study supports this, stating that offering employees opportunities to use English can give them confidence to speak the language. The respondents considered that best ways to
develop language skills were using the language in practical situations, talking with foreigners and spending time abroad.

Despite of the difficulties of *language tests*, they can provide some tools for improving language skills. Having a criterion, not too high but at some level, for new graduates entering the company was mentioned by some of the participants. On the other hand, interviewees were worried that Japanese candidates would not apply to their companies if they were required to have good English skills before entering the company.

Choosing the right *language policy* was considered a way to improve cross-cultural business communication. In company D, many respondents considered that having English as the official language of the company was the best solution. However, none of the participants from other companies considered it the best choice. Most people mentioned that there is no point in communicating in English between Japanese colleagues, although many understood that this would bring also benefits such as constant practise of English skills. Most respondents reported that having English as one of the official languages was the best alternative.

If a Japanese company is aiming at using English more, *hiring foreigners* who speak English in Japanese companies in their Japanese departments was considered a good way to enhance effective use of English. Some Japanese companies are already looking for global-oriented Japanese people with intercultural communications and language skills (Disco Inc. 2012a) or talented people regardless of nationality (Muldowney 2013). As argued by company A respondent, this requires building a bilingual company environment so that foreigners are able to work in Japan. In company D, cross-cultural mobility is already possible and almost all company D respondents were working in a department where there were at least some non-Japanese speakers. Having a common language policy is argued to enhance international job rotation in MNCs (Welch et al. 2005).

It was considered essential that the company creates opportunities for its employees to improve language skills and to bridge cultural differences. People have to adjust
their communication styles, study about different cultures – and most importantly, practise. Therefore, the company can create possibilities for this by promoting diversity at workplace and by offering cultural training for home country employees as well as in subsidiaries, for instance. It was argued by the company A interviewee that people in the company’s subsidiaries or related companies did not have understanding of how business was done in Japan.

Moreover, it seems that not everyone who has good language skills in Japanese companies has the full opportunities to use their talents, and on the other hand, there are people who have to use English even though they prefer not to. To best utilise the company resources, it is important that the company takes these issues into account. Motivated people who have good language skills could do even better if they were provided opportunities to utilise their skills.

Finally, it can be summarised that language issues should be part of company strategy, starting from human resources such as hiring new people and offering training, creating a supportive atmosphere to use English, and making the language strategy match the company’s business needs. Therefore, the company strategy, including language policy but not restricted to it, has to take language issues into account.
6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Conclusions

This paper aims at answering the main research question *What kinds of effects does it bring to use English in business communication in Japanese-based multinational corporations in their departments located in Japan?*. To answer the research question, the main findings of the study are presented next, using the three sub-questions of this research.

The first sub-question of the study is *What is the role of language skills in cross-cultural business communication?*. After building a theoretical framework and conducting empirical research, it can be argued that language skills play an important role in intercultural business communication. According to the findings of this study, cross-cultural business communication skills are based on four concurrent factors including (1) language skills, (2) cultural understanding, (3) conversational skills and (4) business-related skills. The findings of the empirical research highlight the importance of understanding differences in communication styles and having business-related language skills.

Language has various impacts on intercultural communication, including making communication possible, creating a barrier or distorting communication. The data findings indicate that the point of international communication in Japanese corporations is to effectively co-operate with people from different backgrounds in the multicultural business environment. English can be the tool for effective cross-border communication and it is needed in today’s global business world.

The second sub-question is *How do English language skills affect individuals’ job performance in Japanese-based multinational corporations?*. The findings indicate that English language skills offer benefits and bring challenges that affect job performance. Language skills impact how well people perform their tasks in practise, and, indirectly, how people feel they perform their work tasks.
Firstly, language skills can directly affect how well and effectively people perform their work tasks in which they need English. With good English skills people can more effectively participate in communicating with foreigners, perform new kinds of work tasks, get assigned to overseas and have better chances to get promoted. Poor language skills can hinder job performance, most commonly by causing misunderstandings and slowing down communication. Secondly, learning a new language can indirectly contribute to intellectual growth and better understanding of one’s own culture and other cultures. Considering the negative effects, people might feel frustration and that it is difficult to perform their work tasks, or that they are not valued because of poor language skills.

The most important findings on individual level are related to the connection between language skills and career development. Career development is dependent on multiply issues, language skills being one of the contributing factors. The empirical data findings indicate that language skills can contribute to career development in Japanese-based multinational corporations. In all of the four companies studied, it was considered that language skills contribute to getting promoted. Language skills can open doors for career paths that would otherwise not be possible. Language skills can even be required in the initial recruiting process. Of course, language skills do not automatically lead to promotion or abroad assignments. Not everyone has the opportunities to fully utilise their language skills. On the other hand, lack of language skills can impede career development.

According to the findings, there are different opinions about English language skills that are needed in Japanese-based multinational corporations. While internationalisation and the need to use English is emphasised, many feel that using English makes communication difficult in Japanese companies. It can be emphasised that the need for English skills depends on the industry, department and job description in the company. In Japan, Japanese language still plays an important role and not everyone needs to be able to speak English, but it is often beneficial, because language skills can contribute to career development and make it possible to perform work tasks more efficiently.
The third sub-question, *How can the company strategy contribute to effective use of English in Japanese-based multinational corporations?*, aims at examining the situation at company level. The key findings here indicate that the role of management is fundamental. According to the interviews and questionnaire responses, it is essential that the company creates encouraging atmosphere and offers opportunities and tools for its employees to use and develop English language skills. On the other hand, the empirical findings also support that it is not only the company’s task to improve their employees’ language skills but English education in Japan needs a reform.

Finally, the main research question was related to the effects of using English in business communication in Japanese companies. It seems necessary to use English in Japanese companies in order to compete in global markets. It can be stated that using English brings effects on various levels including individual level and company level. Using English has effects on individuals’ job performance and career development as well as on company policy and every day business practices. English is an important tool for communication in Japanese-based multinational corporations.

To summarise, there are two main findings in this study. Firstly, it was found out that there is a strong connection between language skills and career development in Japanese-based MNCs. Secondly, the role of corporate management and company strategy is essential to support effective cross-cultural business communication in Japanese-based multinational corporations.

### 6.2. Managerial implications

The data findings suggest that language issues need to be considered in company strategy. Managers have a fundamental role in effective implementation of a language policy. By creating opportunities for employees to improve their language skills, people will be more motivated to use a foreign language. Furthermore, encouraging atmosphere in the company will enhance intercultural communication.
Managers can incorporate language issues as a part of the company strategy, starting from human resources including recruitment and cross-cultural training as well as creating a supportive atmosphere to use English, promoting diversity and making the language strategy to match the company’s business needs. There are motivated and talented people in Japanese MNCs who could do even better if they were provided opportunities to develop and fully utilise their skills.

It is suggested that the success of Japanese companies in global markets will depend on how effectively they can organise their intercultural business communication (Disco Inc. 2012b). Adjusting company policies and creating supporting methods for employees to use and improve English language skills, will help Japanese companies to compete in the multicultural business world. Findings of this study indicate that managers have great possibilities to contribute to making cross-cultural communication as effective as possible.

6.3. Evaluation of the study

In a qualitative research it is not possible to reach perfect objectivity, since the researcher and the research data are closely connected (Hirsjärvi et al. 1998:161). Moreover, it is argued that the researcher’s background and preconceptions can affect the research (ibid.). The outcome of the study can be affected by the way the researcher is conducting and analysing research (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000:18).

Concepts of reliability and validity are common in quantitative research but they can be used to some extent in qualitative research, too. Reliability traditionally refers to repeatability or consistency of the results, and validity to truthfulness of the results. Golafshani (2003) argues that in qualitative research, reliability and validity mean examining trustworthiness, rigour and quality of the study. How to ensure reliability and validity of qualitative research depends on the research. Using different viewpoints and critically evaluating the study will help. Moreover, it is argued that using multiple research methods will help to ensure better validity and reliability of qualitative research. (Golafshani 2003.)
Fossey et al. (2002) argue that qualitative research should be critically evaluated throughout the research process. The evaluation of this study is based on the criteria presented by Fossey et al. (2002) to evaluate methodological and interpretive rigour. Firstly, the researcher needs to evaluate methodology of the study starting from research design, sampling methods and data collection (ibid.). It was considered that qualitative research method would be the most suitable for this kind of a study in order to gain descriptive data about communication. Moreover, Fossey et al. (2002) argue that the research design needs to be developed and adapted to suit the context. In this study, after conducting three interviews it was considered that changing the research design to include both interviews and a questionnaire would be beneficial.

To ensure interpretive rigour it is important to make sure that “participants’ views are presented in their own voices” (Fossey et al. 2002:725). Furthermore, different views need to be represented. In this study, direct quotes were used. Moreover, as it came up that there are different opinions about using English in Japanese-based MNCs, these viewpoints were all presented in the final analysis.

It is important to share the interpretation of the results with participants of the empirical study (Fossey et al. 2002). According to Yin (1989:145) reviewing the results with the participants can greatly improve validity of the study. In this study, the interviewees were asked to review and comment the summary of the empirical findings.

In qualitative research, context is the key to understand the phenomenon that is studied (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000:146). Therefore, this research focuses on the situation of using English in the context of Japanese-based multinational corporations. To create better contextual understanding, internationalisation of Japanese companies, English education in Japan and traditional models of Japanese career development were presented in the theoretical part.

In this research, interviews and a questionnaire were used to collect empirical data. It is argued that there are restrictions related to questionnaires as a research method (Hirsjärvi et al. 1998:191). For example, it is possible that respondents
misunderstand some questions (ibid.). It is also difficult to know whether the respondents have answered truthfully and taken enough time to answer the questions (ibid.). Moreover, it is possible that few people decide to participate (ibid.). In this research, two research methods were used to ensure adequate amount of qualitative data. The questionnaire was tested and modified according to the feedback before sending the actual questionnaire.

6.4. Limitations

This study focuses on business communication in English in Japanese companies. The situation in other countries is most probably significantly different. Moreover, this study only describes using English at workplace, although there are other languages involved in today’s multicultural business world. Furthermore, career development in Japan traditionally differs from that of other countries (Kazuo 1996:87,262). On the other hand, the situation in Japanese-based MNCs is rapidly changing, as discussions of introducing English as a common corporate language are going on in some Japanese companies (Takahashi 2010). It might be that in a few years, the situation is different.

In the literature review, mainly articles written in English were used as background information. Therefore, it is possible that a more precise view on articles written in Japanese would give a more complete picture of the situation. Harzing (2005) states that using English in a questionnaire for non-native English speakers can make it harder to find out cultural differences. However, because of the limited resources of the research, the questionnaire was provided only in English.

This study aims at examining the current situation of using English from the viewpoint of Japanese-based multinational corporations. The results of the study cannot be generalised across different corporations, countries or time frames. For better understanding of the effects of languages in international business, further research is needed.
6.5. Suggestions for further research

This study focuses on describing the situation in Japan in four companies from different industries. Only the effects of one language are studied. Because of the limited scope of the study, the results cannot be generalised. More research needs to be done examining the effects of languages in business communication in other countries. Moreover, studies on wider scope are needed (Harzing & Pudelko 2013).

This study aims at creating better understanding of effective cross-cultural communication. The focus is on Japanese MNCs’ departments located in Japan, leaving subsidiary relations beyond the scope of the study. Mainly Japanese-speaking employees working in Japan participated in the empirical research. As Harzing and Pudelko (2013) suggest, there are still many language related issues such as language and knowledge transfer, expatriation and level of autonomy that need both case studies and comprehensive studies. To understand which factors contribute to effective cross-cultural business communication, the connection between language skills, job performance and career development needs to be studied in wider scope.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1

OUTLINE OF THE INTERVIEWS

Using English at workplace

1. Introduction to the research topic

2. Starting questions and company policy
   - To start with, could you please tell briefly who you are and what kind of work you do? Just for background information.
   - In what kinds of situations do you use English at work?
   - Why is English used in these situations instead of Japanese or another language?
   - Does your company have some rules about when you have to use English? (company policy of using English)
   - Does your company offer language training? For whom? Are people encouraged to participate?

3. Effects of using English
   - Do you think it brings benefits for you in your company if you can speak English? If yes, what kind of?
   - What has helped you to develop your English skills that you need at work?
   - Have you faced some difficulties when using English? If yes, what kind of difficulties? Please give examples.
   - What kinds of situations feel most difficult? What do you do in these situations?
   - How do these difficulties affect doing business? Do you have some examples?
   - Do you feel using English changes the way of communication? If yes, in what way?

4. Japanese companies and English
   - In your company, do you feel that English is currently used more than before? Is the situation changing?
   - Do you think using English brings some benefits for the company?
   - Does the company encourage people to use English?
   - What are the biggest challenges for Japanese companies when introducing English?
   - Do you think there are some special characteristics when introducing English in Japanese companies than elsewhere in the world?
   - Do you think English is used effectively in [your company]? If there is something to improve, how would you improve the situation?
Do you think it is important for [your company] to use English? Why or why not?
Do you feel it is important to use English in Japanese companies in general? Why or why not?

5. Brief summary
- benefits for companies and individuals
- challenges for companies and individuals
- company policy
- situation in Japanese companies

6. Possibility to discuss remaining issues

7. Closing the interview
INVITATION FOR INTERVIEWS IN ENGLISH

Dear Sir or Madam,

I would kindly like to invite you for an interview regarding using English in Japanese companies. I’m an exchange student from Tohoku University, and this interview is related to my master's thesis research. The study focuses on the effects of English language on communication in Japanese companies. This is a current topic in Japan, as many Japanese companies are using English more and more.

I feel your ideas as part of a successful international company, [company name], could bring great contribution to my research. The aim of the study is to understand better, how to make communication in English most effective.

I would be very happy to have an interview with you. The interview would take about 30 minutes.

Any company names or names of the participants will not be mentioned in the study. There are a few Japanese companies involved in the study. Therefore, your answers are confidential.

The results of the study will be sent to [the company] after the research, so that [the company] can use the findings, as the results might include useful information for your company about using English effectively.

I’m sending here brief ideas about the research, including some questions that I would like to discuss during the interview. If possible, I would like to do the discussion in English, however, you can also answer some questions in Japanese if there are some things that are difficult to explain in English.

I’m a master degree student from Finland and my major is International Business. I have done previous research on the effects of English language in my home university in Finland, based on knowledge on European companies. Now during my 1-year research programme in Tohoku University, I'm studying Japanese culture and Japanese language, and focusing on research about using English in Japanese companies.

I would be very happy to have the chance to have a discussion together with you. Thank you for your kind consideration.

Kindest regards,

Miina Ojanperä
突然のメールで失礼いたします。
私は、東北大学で現在交換留学をしている大学院二年生のミーナ・オンペラと申します。

私は、現在英語が日本の会社におけるビジネスコミュニケーションにどのような影響を与えているのか、というテーマで修士論文を書いており、よろしければ、御社の方に直接お話を伺いたく、連絡させていただいています。

私は、国際ビジネスを専攻しており、母国であるフィンランドの大学で、英語がどのようにヨーロッパの会社に影響を与えているかという研究を行いました。したがって、日本の交換留学中に、ぜひ日本の会社において、英語がビジネスに与える影響を、研究してみたく思っております。グローバル化に伴い、日本でも、ビジネスの場において英語の重要性は年々増えており、多くの会社が英語をビジネスにおいて使用しています。そこで、グローバル企業として素晴らしい成功を収めていらっしゃる御社の方に、インタビュー形式でお話を伺いさせていただきたいのです。

研究の意図と申しますと、英語でのコミュニケーションのビジネスにおける影響をよりよく理解し、さらに、英語でのコミュニケーションをいかに効果的に使っていくか、ということです。ほかの日本の会社のいくつかにもお話を伺わせていただいております。もちろん、論文中におきまして、御社のお名前、また、インタビューに参加していただいた方のお名前を出すことは決してありません。また、この研究の結果は、その後御社に送らせていただき、御社で英語をより有用に使っていくための資料として使っていたけら、と思っております。

私の研究についての簡単な概要と、インタビューにお伺いしたい何点かの質問を添付ファイルとして送らせていただいております。よろしければ、英語でインタビューを行わせていただきたいのですが、英語で説明しづらいような内容がありましたら、日本語でお話しいただいても構いません。

インタビューは30分程度を予定しております。
お忙しい中大変恐縮ですが、どうか、検討のほどよろしくお願いいたします。

ミーナ・オンペラ
QUESTIONNAIRE FORM

Using English at workplace

This is a survey about using English at workplace in Japanese companies. The survey is part of a master's thesis research by Miina Ojanperä, a student from Tohoku University, Japan, and the University of Oulu, Finland.

The aim of the study is to better understand the effects of using English in Japanese companies. The study aims at answering questions such as: How does using English change communication in Japanese companies? What kinds of benefits does using English bring? What kinds of challenges are involved when communicating in English? The goal of the research is to understand, how English is best used in Japanese companies.

Please answer according to your personal opinion. Your name, your position, the company name or any personal information will not be mentioned in the study.

Background information

*Please write here the name of your current company, department and position.*

(This information will not be mentioned in the study.)

____________________________________________________________________

*Family name, first name*  
(For example: Sato, Kanako. Your name will not be mentioned in the study.)

____________________________________________________________________

*Your e-mail address*  
(this will not be mentioned in the study)

____________________________________________________________________

*Gender*  
☐ Male  
☐ Female
1. What is your native language? *
   - Japanese
   - English
   - Other: ______________________

2. How long have you worked in the company where you work now? *
   - 0–2 years
   - 2–5 years
   - 5–10 years
   - 10–20 years
   - more than 20 years

Situations in which English is used

3. In your current job, how often do you usually use English at work? 
   - almost all the time
   - every day
   - a few times a week
   - a few times a month
   - it varies a lot, sometimes very often, sometimes not at all
   - not at all

4. In what kinds of situations do you use English at work? 
   (several answers okay)
   - talking face-to-face with foreigners
   - talking on phone with foreigners
   - sending e-mail to foreigners
   - meetings (in Japan)
   - online meetings with foreigners
   - business trips to foreign countries
   - writing documents/reports
   - reading documents written in English
   - Other:_________________________
   ______________________________
   ______________________________

5. Why is English used in these situations? 
   (several answers okay)
   - communicating with foreigners who do not speak Japanese
   - company regulations require using English
   - good practice to improve English skills
   - the company is aiming at creating an image of a global company
   - Other:_________________________
   ______________________________
   ______________________________
6. How many non-Japanese speakers are there in your department/everyday workplace?
(Your own estimation is okay.)

- Everybody speaks Japanese in my department
- 1 or 2 people are non-Japanese speakers
- less than 10 % are non-Japanese speakers
- 10–20 % are non-Japanese speakers
- 20–50 % are non-Japanese speakers
- 50–80 % are non-Japanese speakers
- 80–100% are non-Japanese speakers

English and my company

7. Do you feel that English is now used more in your company than before?

- much more than before
- a little more than before
- it has not changed much
- less than before
- I haven't worked for the company very long so I don't know

8. In which departments does it seem important to use English?
(several answers okay)

- production
- engineering
- sales and marketing
- logistics
- exporting
- IT
- research and development
- human resources
- financial
- headquarters
- all departments

9. What do you think is the best policy for your company to use English?

- English as the only official language of the company
- English as one of the official languages of the company (for example English and Japanese)
- English as the only official language of some departments
- English as one of the official languages of some departments
- no need to specify the role of English language

10. How important for the future of your company is it to use English?

- one of the most important things
- important but not among the first priorities
- not very important
- not important at all
11. How would you describe the attitude towards English in your company?

- very encouraging
- somewhat encouraging
- indifferent
- discouraging
- Other:_________________________________________________________

My experience of using English

12. What kinds of benefits does it bring for you in your company if you can speak English?

(several answers okay)

- opportunities to go abroad
- opportunities to get assigned for different kinds of work tasks
- promotion
- respect from other employees
- self-confidence
- Other:_________________________________________________________

13. What kinds of difficulties have you faced when communicating in English?

(several answers okay)

- difficulties to understand each other
- not possible to understand each other
- misunderstandings
- communication becomes slow
- trying to avoid situations in which English is used
- frustration because I cannot express what I would like to
- difficulties to participate in conversation during meetings
- difficulties to write official documents
- difficulties to read official documents
- Other:_________________________________________________________

14. When you face difficulties, why do these situations feel difficult?

(several answers okay)

- I have difficulties to understand other people
- It is difficult to make other people to understand me
- I feel my verbal language skills are not good enough
- I feel my written language skills are not good enough
- I am not familiar with the vocabulary related to the topic
- Other people's language skills are not very high
- People's accents and dialects are difficult to understand
- Communication style in English is different than in my own language
Having English as the official language
Please imagine a situation in which English is set as one the official languages of your company.

15. How do you feel if you are required to use English in the workplace? (several answers okay)
- positive
- anxious
- neutral
- negative
- a necessary part of my job
- a chance to improve my language skills
- a chance to improve my career
- Other:

16. How do you feel when communicating with your Japanese colleagues in another language apart from Japanese? (several answers okay)
- it is necessary in a global company
- good practice to improve language skills
- it has both benefits and disadvantages
- it makes communication difficult
- there is no point in speaking other language than Japanese with Japanese colleagues
- Other:

17. Are you willing to use English in your workplace?
- Yes, I am very willing to use English
- Yes, I am somewhat willing to use English
- I prefer not to but I have to use English
- No, I do not want to use English

18. If your company would like to use more English, what kinds of things would be important? (several answers okay)
- language training offered by the company
- hiring more foreign staff who speak English in a Japanese company in Japan
- having English as the official language or one of the official languages of the company
- creating an atmosphere that supports people to use English
□ setting a minimum requirement (for example English language test such as TOEIC) for new employees entering the company
□ Other:

______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Japanese companies and English

19. Do you think it is important for everyone in a Japanese company to speak English?
   □ Yes, everyone should speak good English
   □ Yes, everyone should speak at least some English
   □ No, only people who communicate with foreigners should speak English
   □ No, no one needs to be able to speak English

English skills at workplace

20. How have you developed your English skills that you need at work? (several answers okay)
   □ school (primary school, junior high school, high school, university)
   □ student exchange
   □ language training offered by the company
   □ private language school
   □ studying on my own
   □ working experience abroad
   □ Other: __________________________

Thank you for your time. If you have any other comments, please write your ideas here.

Thank you. Your answers are valuable for the study.